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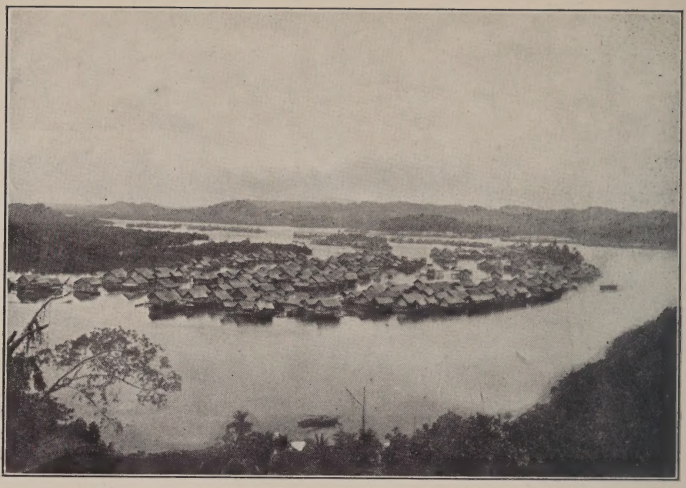
ON THE FRINGE OF EASTERN SEAS



Brunei.

ON THE FRINGE OF EASTERN SEAS

The City of Many Waters

BY

PETER BLUNDELL

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To
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THE CITY OF MANY WATERS

CHAPTER I

THE oriental-looking crane drew closer. I watched his coming as I lay on the parched grass by the lake in the hot sunshine, at first incuriously, for I was busy thinking of other things.

Why was it that I had been condemned by the gods for months past to live the life of a man about town (of the impecunious variety), I, well trained as an engineer, highly certified and, yes, at a pinch quite willing to work for a living? Unanswerable question! The fact remained that nobody seemed to want me. My well-considered replies to advertisements had been uniformly ignored, my personal applications for work had been received without thanks. I, as were in all probability most of the other men sitting about me on the grass in Kew Gardens that summer morning, was one of the mighty

throng which the world could do very well without.

The crane drew closer, walking with immense deliberation. His grey suit was beautifully tailored. His beady eyes twinkled in the sunlight. He paused, his elegant shadow clear cut in black on the parched grass, and had a good look at me.

I was growing very interested in that crane, for a notion concerning his mission had occurred to me, and believer in luck as I have always been, I was now beginning to wonder what would happen next. Would he pass me by, or would he by making some motion of that wise head of his indicate that he, different from most of the employers of engineers in London, liked my appearance? Had he, indeed, provisionally selected me for that berth out East?

Yes, out East, for I—— But no matter just yet.

He didn't pass me by. He could endure my appearance evidently. He came closer, always with the utmost caution and deliberation, a very Aberdonian of a crane, paused again, pretended that he had found a worm, looked up shrewdly to see whether I was taken in or not, and saw by my smile that I wasn't. That seemed

to settle his opinion in my favour. He advanced to my side with two quick strides, and before I knew it had tapped me on the shoulder.

I was, then, going out East ! This I believed now as firmly as I believed in steam boilers. Fate's sword had fallen. I gave a shout of delight.

" An accolade ! " I said aloud in my excitement. " An accolade ! "

Those on the grass about me looked up indignantly from their dreaming. The parti-coloured flocks of water-birds fled towards the blue water with discordant screams. The willows were whispering in the breeze.

I jumped up and half ran towards the gates. I was certain, certain as a man could be, that my luck had changed, that I was going to get that berth.

Back to my rich relative's rooms in Kensington I fled as fast as tram and bus could carry me. There was the letter I had expected and longed for, white against the black marble clock. It was covered with blue pencil marks and notes of interrogation in red ink. The advertisers had mis-read my writing. They had addressed me at " Kennington," not " Kensington." The letter had been all over the place. The advertisers

had asked me to call on them in the City the day before. In any other circumstances I should have just sunk back in my rich relative's comfortable arm-chair and groaned. But fortified by that episode of the crane, I didn't groan. I put on my hat and bolted for the City. Late or not, that berth as factory engineer at twenty pounds per month with free furnished quarters was, I knew, certainly mine.

Travelling East, you notice, already, past the Bank, along the side of Liverpool Street Station, by Devonshire Square, where the Quakers have their meeting house. Round about this part of the City the streets have intriguing names. There is Wormwood Street, for instance. There is Camomile Street.

The entrance passage to my office was flanked on one side by the shop of a postage stamp dealer, on the other by a cigar merchant's. I caught a glimpse of a three-cornered Cape of Good Hope basking in the seclusion of a dirty window, and cheroots wrapped round with green silk and straw. The brass plates on the portals were not those of companies, but of syndicates. There was the Pearla Sandakana Syndicate, The Mandalay Tin and Silver Syndicate, The Alluvial Diamond Dredging Syndicate.

The first floor door bore in plain black the name of the syndicate whose secretary had summoned me. Inside, on opening it, I found a small dingy office. A skinny girl in spectacles with a face grave as that of a mandarin sat on a three-legged stool stealthily tickling a typewriter.

" What do you want ? "

The voice came suddenly and softly from a door on my right. A man put his head round the pintle and blinked at me. The picture of that head remained in my memory for years. It was yellow, bald and wrinkled. Its broad brow carried a dome like St. Sophia's. Below the cruel slit of a mouth grew a beard black as ink. There stared at me a pair of large eyes, green and opaque as shallow seas.

" I 've come in answer to your advertisement for an engineer."

" Ha ! "

The scraggy figure that supported the head came with a crab-like action round the pintle. An emaciated hand, upon which glittered a yellow diamond, clawed the letter I held up from me.

" You are a day late," observed the person in his velvet voice.

"I am," I acknowledged, staring at the sealskin waistcoat he wore, the black stock and the huge cameo pin. "The letter was addressed wrongly. I live in Kensington, not Kennington."

"Come in here," he purred, without any hesitation.

In the room to which he took me, with his fat right hand laid on the green baize cover of a long table, and his fat body so spread out as to let his large stomach hang free, sat another curious person. He was aged about sixty and was also quite bald. On his heavy, weather-stained face brown hair grew where it listed. His eyes were small, shrewd, and very blue.

"Our chief director," said sealskin waistcoat.

There were black japanned boxes on the shelves of the room, whose white lettering told me that these offices were in the occupation of more than one syndicate. There were perhaps fifty boxes of cigars stacked on a side table.

The director gave me a cigar. Then both men began to question me, very softly and very tactfully.

I have dwelt particularly on the appearance of these two men as I remembered it then because most of my Borneo life was spent under

their influence directed on to me by means of letters from London. They are both of them dead now, and I don't think if you asked the average Borneo man you would find he included them in his saints' calendar. But whatever their faults, if any, in their conduct towards the world in general, this I will say, that they were both very pleasant men to meet, and I think of them kindly.

It was nearly seven o'clock when, tolerably elated, I arrived back at the Kensington rooms. I found my rich relation already dressed and about to dine. We exchanged congratulations. A few days afterwards he saw me off at Southampton.

They told me that the stewards' band on the German steamers playing at Southampton when the tender arrived from the shore often had the effect of making the embarking passengers weep at the thought that they were leaving dear old England, their friends and relatives, perhaps for ever.

But for me to set foot on that white deck was happiness.

The tender left for the shore, the band stopped playing, the whistle hooted three melancholy hoots, and we all went down to lunch.

The passengers in the Second Class got to know each other very gradually. By the time we reached Stromboli I was on speaking terms with most of them. But when I went ashore at Naples I went alone.

Naples seen from the ship, with the hills behind its white huddles and splashes of houses and the grey-green of its groves and the curved, foam-edged, turquoise water in between, is a picture fit for any suburban drawing-room. Naples seen close, with its slums and its washing out to dry and its pumice dust, cobbles, beggars, cab-drivers, guides and dung-hills, well—put it in the smoking-room.

I went ashore, as I have said, alone. Mechanically I took out a big pipe and lit it. It was a mistaken action. If I had lit a cigarette I might have slipped through unnoticed. But the pipe drove home to all Naples what perhaps they had only dimly realised before, that I was an Englishman.

Six cab-drivers came up at once and loudly made known their desire that I should hire them. Guides by the dozen followed me along the street.

I tried to pretend that I did not know any of them were there. They kicked my heels

and cracked their whips in front of my nose. I bolted down an alley, doubled along another street, and gaining the shelter of a doorway looked cautiously around. Thank Heavens, I had shaken them off.

Stealing out from my shelter I began to walk uphill.

"Want a guide, sir?"

"No!" I shouted in a fury, facing about.

The grinning monster standing before me, hat in hand, was, I recognised him, the most importunate of those who had followed me from the ship. He was a youth in the twenties, dirty, ragged, unshaven, and with a hide of rhinoceros thickness. He wore a striped india-rubber collar.

"I don't want a guide," I said categorically. "I don't want to see the Aquarium, I don't want to see the Museum or the Opera House or any churches, paintings or sculptures. I hate 'em all. What I want is to be left alone in peace. Do you understand?"

"Very good drive over the Posilipo Hill——"

"I don't want to drive," I yelled. "I want to be left alone. Go away!"

"Or by train to Sorrento and Amalfi," he continued, unmoved.

"I don't——"

"To see Mount Vesuvius, Pompeii, Herculaneum——"

"I hate 'em all!"

"Or by steamer to Capri and Ischia, very cheap."

I was becoming furiously angry with this guide who would not leave me alone.

"Look here," I said, changing my tone, "what can you do, anyhow?"

"I can do anything, sir," he said with confidence.

Such enterprise deserved encouraging. But I determined to give him a task to puzzle him.

"Very well, then," I returned. "I've no time for much sight-seeing. But take me to see the most beautiful thing in Naples."

The dirty youth turned and looked me up and down. To my disappointment he did not seem at all puzzled by my request. He hailed a cab and bundled me into it.

We were driving uphill, through streets lined with shops. Where was he taking me to, I wondered. What would he, this ragged denizen, consider his ancient city's most beautiful possession.

The carriage turned under a low archway

between two shops into what looked like the courtyard of a palace. Invited, I left my seat and followed the guide through a wooden doorway heavily studded with nails.

" What can it be, here in the middle of the shopping district ? " I pondered. " Some piece of sculpture ? "

The hall we came to appeared to be used as a café. There were a dozen round-topped tables.

A corpulent, very dark man came from the side. He had a scar on his low forehead half hidden by smooth black hair. I particularly noticed his thick gold watch chain.

The guide spoke to him in a low tone. He looked at me shrewdly and bowed, turned and gave an order to a waiter, who, running off, came back almost at once bearing a flask of wine and glasses.

The guide told me to sit down. I did so, but I would not drink any wine. Why should they want me to drink wine ? There were other men about. I did not like their looks. I was already meditating a dash for the door.

When a girl came out from somewhere, smiling, blond, painted and very handsome, and advanced with a coquettish look towards

where I sat, I began to get an inkling of what had happened.

Perhaps the guide was right when he thought she was the most beautiful thing in Naples. But I decided that whatever her beauty I was better elsewhere.

"Good afternoon, all," I said, rising and bowing with all the politeness I could muster. And putting half a sovereign on the table I turned and ran—yes, ran—for the door.

What those Italians must have thought of English manners I can only imagine. But I had a feeling, and I have one still, that it was an occasion when what other people think of one's manners matters very little.

There were many other incidents on the voyage. That of the chief officer falling down the hold and breaking his neck on the evening when the German first-class passengers were in the midst of what is called a "beer-supper," that of the insulted lady's-maid who asked me to fight the offensive Ceylon planter—he was six foot high and three foot wide, and, besides, it was not my quarrel.

The sights and scents of the Canal, the camels, the scriptural scenery of the Red Sea, the glorious

Stromboli.

The Suez Canal

sunsets of the Indian Ocean, and the spicy breezes wafted to us from unseen Ceylon, all these come back to me as I write about my first voyage East.

Half of us passengers left the ship at Singapore. I stayed at the Adelphi with two passengers I know well. I saw the Syndicate's Singapore agents, who said I should be all right in Borneo so long as I wasn't stuck in the middle of a mangrove swamp. I visited my fellow-passenger, the oil borer from Baku, at the de la Paix, and found him seated at a table with the punkah going and a six-chambered revolver laid on either side of him, selecting from a number of candidates a Chinese servant to take with him to Sumatra. None of them, I noticed, seemed anxious to go.

Singapore has not changed much. The same old names are over the European stores. Probably their owners to-day are going about England in cars adorned with coronets. None of us Easterners will complain if that is so. They have done well by—if out of—Singapore.

CHAPTER II

ON the voyage the East had unrolled itself as a series of pictures. The coaling coolies at Port Said had all looked very much alike. The men at Colombo seemed a little darker coloured, that was all. The ricksha' coolies in Singapore were much of a muchness, some bigger, some fatter than others.

At Labuan I began to get a little closer to the pictures. I observed that some of the black men I saw looked jolly, some sorrowful, that some of the Chinese I was introduced to were obsequious and ingratiating in manner, and that others—later on I had the pleasure of owing money to some of these—were as haughty as the wives of archdeacons.

At Labuan I met for the first time what ten thousand miles away from home might almost be termed a relative. He was the son of my brother's godfather, and a retired sea-captain who occupied the position of pilot.

We arrived at Victoria, the only town in the island, about breakfast time, creeping in along a grass-green channel from the turquoise

water of the bay. Almost within touching distance on the left lay groves of coconut palms. The palms were stunted and growing old. Their sun-stained leaves swept the beach. I saw huts made of reeds and unpainted fishing-boats, tanned nets hanging out to dry, children with shaven heads and naked save for an amulet or so, a red-robed, brown, handsome woman, whose black hair hung loose. She clasped her baby to her bosom and waved at the sailors with her free hand.

On deck burning rays of the tropic sun were already piercing the awning. We swept by a rocky island covered with fern, palm and tangled creeper and up to the dilapidated wharf.

Now I began to cast anxious looks around for my new relative. Although a pilot, the German captain told me, he did not pilot German steamers such as this one of ours into Labuan harbour. The entrance was easy, said the German captain, so naturally ("Ho! ho!") the German captains piloted their own ships in and took the pilotage money for themselves. I rather gathered that my new relative, whose name was Brown, strongly objected to this arrangement, and that he consequently was not very popular with the German captains, who

at that time were men of great importance on the Singapore, Borneo, and Philippines run.

We got alongside the wharf, propeller fluttering. The telegraph went. Standing looking at the gaily-dressed crowd of natives who had assembled to watch our arrival, I saw a large man in khaki and pith helmet stroll by. I heard our German commander address him as "Captain" from the bridge. They swore at each other in friendly fashion. Was this man in khaki my new relative? He wore a red beard. His nose was of a different tint of the same colour. He looked very fierce. I remember having heard from my mother that my brother's godfather looked fierce also, and appeared unused to christenings.

Presently I stole ashore and approached the stranger timorously. He was giving instructions to a small Malay attired in a turban and very little else.

"Are you Captain Brown?" I asked.

The stranger fixed me with his glittering eye.

"I 'm glad to say I 'm not," he answered shortly. "My name 's Smithy if you want to know."

" Ah," I said, with as much ease as I could muster. " A warm morning."

" Not so warm as it is where Brown 's going to," he returned with candour.

I retired slightly discomfited. Evidently Labuan was stiff with captains. Presently I made inquiries of the mate of the ship.

" Oh," said he with a smile, " Smithy looks after the shipping of cargo for a company here, and as the ships come here for his cargo he reckons he ought to have all Brown's pilot money, but Brown doesn't see it. So naturally they 're enemies."

" Naturally," I returned with a dismal feeling.

I wondered whether my new relative was going to be an asset. He was, I am pleased to say. He had a short temper, so short, in fact, that he was always at the end of it. What with his wife and big family, who were devoted and expensive, his small earnings, the enemies he had made, and the servants who robbed him, I 'm afraid Brown had a poor time at Labuan. The magic of the East never gripped Brown. His ambition was a little cottage in Liverpool.

Soon I met him, a small roundabout figure in a white drill suit, with a red face, little suspicious eyes and a grey moustache. At once

he insisted on taking all my luggage up to his bungalow.

Labuan is an island some eight miles long by six miles wide. Very flat and sandy towards the southern end, where the harbour lies, it attains to an elevation of fifty feet or so towards the north. Here exists coal and a mine in which generations of optimistic people have lost their money.

The Eastern Extension Telegraph Station and the bungalows of nearly all the European inhabitants, who number nearly twenty, stand on a slight eminence about a mile inland from the harbour.

Between the bungalows and the sea are sandy flats and bogs of black mud intersected with wide drainage ditches where crabs and mosquitoes breed. These flats are covered with dwarf vegetation and coconut palms.

My new relative had his small bungalow near a ditch about half-way between the harbour and the Telegraph Station. Close by was another small bungalow where Eurasians performed continuously on the concertina. At least I thought it was continuously, and complained about it to Brown next morning. But he explained that what I had heard during the small hours was

not the concertina but the bull frogs in an adjoining pond.

"You 'll soon get used to these things," said Brown to me as we sat at breakfast on his hot little veranda, surrounded by photographs of his wife, his descendants and his ancestors, and Japanese fans tied with pink ribbon.

"Oh, yes," I agreed, "I shall shake down."

The fish at breakfast was excellent mullet. Never have I met a more hospitable man than Brown. He couldn't do enough for me.

"Did you get any mosquitoes last night?" he asked. "They 're bad about here owing to the swamps. But they 're worse over in Brunei, where you 're going. They 're as large as tigers there. But you 'll get used to them, no doubt. You 'll get used to them."

Mrs. Brown and the family were in England, he told me, adding that knowing of his bereavement some of the fat women of indefinite breed who dwelt at the back of the harbour were continually asking him to be allowed to come and stay in his bungalow as housekeepers. They had all been refused, and from what he said with contumely. I do not doubt his word.

That day I went down and saw the Syndicate's agent, a pawky Scot, at his corrugated iron office.

He told me that a launch was leaving for the mainland early next morning. It was on this launch, that belonged to the Sarawak Government, that I made my " entry " into Borneo.

There was a young man on board the launch also going to the mainland. He had a pale face, grey eyes, and a languid manner, and wore a white duck suit, canvas shoes and a shabby sun helmet.

He had been out East three years, he told me, in the Sarawak Government Service, and had just been discharged from hospital at Labuan. His malaria and dysentery, he said, had left him rather weak, but he was going to try for a few snipe before going back to Sarawak. I told him who I was and that I was going to Brunei. He eyed me compassionately.

" That 's Pulau Daat," he said, changing the subject.

The island he pointed out lies across the mouth of Victoria Harbour. It is about two miles long and covered with coconut palms.

" An Englishman lives there," he added. " A clever fellow, but eccentric to a degree. He 's a woman-hater. He doesn't care much for Europeans either. He lives a native life with a lot of Malay hangers-on."

" Gone native ? " I asked.

He nodded, adding that now we were beginning to get a good view of Borneo.

I turned as I sat in my cane chair to look at the sacred mountain Kinabalu rising faint and rosy from its bath of morning mist. The gods of the natives dwell there, my companion told me, smiling, and went on to say that the mountain rose out of a plain covered with forest to a height of nearly fourteen thousand feet.

" Then the gods are pretty safe from interference," I hazarded.

" One or two people have been to the top," said he. " Spencer St. John found forget-me-nots growing among pitcher plants up there. And ice on the water in the morning," he added longingly.

Across the blue sparkling sea stood gloriously the hills and mountains of Brunei, receding and rising until they faded into the blue.

A sandy flat island on the starboard bow drew ever nearer. We slid round its eastern spit within a stone's throw of the beach. This island, Moara, almost completely blocks the entrance to the Brunei and Limbang rivers. Here it was that the pirates of former days when

attacked by the Rajah of Sarawak and the British gunboats which had been put at his disposal were so fond of seeking shelter. There was not a vestige of cultivation to be seen. There was not a sign of life anywhere. The flat white water of the estuary stretched on our left for miles. The mangrove swamps and small low islands that fringed it stood as if on a layer of air, shimmering in the heat. Here, indeed, seemed to be nature unstained by man. But, stranger though I might be, I knew otherwise. I thought of what I had read of these seas :—

> " The year 1858 was marked by a great revival of piracy. A Spanish vessel was taken by Panglima Taupan of Tawi-Tawi. A young girl, the daughter of a Spanish merchant, was the only one on board not massacred. Taupan took her for a wife."

And again :—

> " After an hour or so the look-out at the mast-head reported three vessels in sight right ahead. Brooke did not give the order to fire until we came within two hundred and fifty yards of them, and

they opened their lelahs (brass swivel guns) upon us some time before we commenced firing. . . . After the first prau was run down I had to go below to attend to our own wounded, but I plainly felt the concussion as we rammed the others. The pirates fought to the last. . . . The captives were of all nationalities. It is a marvel how these poor creatures survive under the terrible tortures they endure. Those whom the pirates spare they take on board their own praus, beat them with a flat piece of bamboo at the elbows and knees and muscles of the arms and legs so that they cannot use them to swim or run away. When sufficiently tamed they are put to the sweeps. Those who will not work are krissed and thrown overboard. They are made to row in relays night and day, and to keep them awake the pirates put cayenne pepper in their eyes, or cut them with their knives and put pepper into their wounds."

I looked with a certain rapture around me. It was here these events of which I had read as a boy had happened. And the Sultans of

Brunei, that mysterious town far up this wan, white estuary, had been ever aiders and abetters of the pirates. More, the present Sultan, this I knew, had in his young days been an active warrior himself. Was I, who had time and again thrilled, with horror and detestation maybe, but yet thrilled, as I read of the deeds of pirate chiefs, was I sooner or later to meet a pirate chief in the flesh and shake him respectfully by the hand, as one does a great financier?

There seemed, indeed, to be a chance of it. Intrigued, I gazed at the tangle of reeds, thorn bushes and low mangrove that covered the wind-swept island down whose coast the launch was rushing. It looked to me in my mood just then desolate, sinister, as if a curse was upon it. It seemed to brood in the intense heat.

At Brooketon—that afternoon when I first came to it is not so very long ago—was already established a flourishing coal mine, equipped with boilers, steam engines, funnels, railways, locomotives.

There were corrugated iron sheds and stacks of coal. A European in khaki was standing in the sunlight near to where I landed, talking to a group of blue-clad Chinese

coolies. He spoke what sounded to me like Welsh.

Somebody has told me since that the Chinese understand Welsh. Whether this is true or not I cannot say, but they certainly seemed to understand that European.

He too appeared from his expression sorry for me when he learnt that I was going to Brunei. He inquired how I was going to get there.

" He 'll have to hire a boat," said the Sarawak Government official, and very kindly he went and hired one for me.

It was a broad, flat-bottomed affair some twelve feet long with a bamboo deck. I looked at it doubtfully. I looked at its two owners still more doubtfully. They were undersized and scantily attired, chocolate of complexion and fierce of eye. The swords they carried were ornamented with hair dyed blood-red.

" You 'll be all right with these chaps," said he of Sarawak encouragingly.

I nodded, smiling feebly. It was evidently a blood-stained district.

Presently I found myself seated beside my luggage in the middle of that boat with one savage at the back of me and one in front, paddling

out into the unknown. I recollected from my reading that it was somewhere hereabouts that Abdul Hassan, a Turkish merchant, was captured by some Ilanun pirates and flayed alive. I hoped that I myself would get through safe to Brunei.

CHAPTER III

I GOT out my gun and loaded it with buckshot, both barrels. I did this with as unconcerned an air as possible, but nevertheless my action seemed to excite the interest, not to say the suspicion, of the savages. They stopped paddling and exchanged remarks in a guttural tone. The long-haired one at the back had a lot to say. He was a man to whom at first sight I had taken a dislike. His nose was all wrong from my point of view—flat, wide-nostrilled; his lips were thin and stained; the whites of his small eyes were yellow; his scanty clothing dirty and ragged; and the scabbard of his sword appeared to have seen much service, the very human hair that ornamented it being worn and moth-eaten.

It was a savage, in fact, of unrefined appearance, who certainly would not be at all delicate in his methods of dealing out death to his victims. A crafty fellow, too, I surmised looking at the cunning smile that disfigured

his countenance as he gazed longingly at my gun.

I held my gun tightly with my right hand, and with my left searched the pocket of my stiff new khaki suit, bringing out at last a small green-covered vocabulary of the Malay language. It was a vocabulary compiled by a missionary, and quite useful when things were going smoothly. I found the word I wanted.

"Burong!" I told the long-haired savage with emphasis. "Burong!"

He nodded, grinning evilly. I could see he did not believe me. He knew well that I had not loaded that gun simply to kill passing birds.

But he had wisdom enough to recognise my excuse for the display of force was on the surface plausible, and that he could in fairness raise no objection to my carrying a loaded gun for the purposes of sport.

Besides, he had sense enough to know that if he had raised an objection I should not have understood it, my knowledge of Malay being infinitesimal at that time.

He produced from his hair a long palm leaf cigarette and lit it, not with a fire stick or a flint and tinder, but with a match from a box adorned with the names of Bryant and May.

His comrade at the bow imitated his example.

They set to paddling again at a leisurely stroke, and we slowly crept through the glassy water into the unknown.

It was at a time of day when the Borneo sun, sinking in the west, is no longer that white ball of fury that torments from its inaccessible throne in the milk-white sky the man and the beast, the birds and the reptiles, the trees and the flowers of the jungle. Now the light it threw was mellow. Its rays had lost their whiteness, and the heat of them was a comfort rather than a torment.

The estuary lay before me smooth as a looking-glass. Its waters coloured blue close at hand paled into white in the distance. Not a boat but ours was sailing them that afternoon. Not a sign of life did I see on the low green grassy hills that rose gently from the sandy shore on my right. Here just now the world seemed still at its siesta. Over on the port side the land was low and very far away. It appeared for miles and miles to be nothing but a vast swamp. Behind rose mountains, high, jagged, and very blue. The tops of them were faint against the heavens.

We crept close in shore again, or perhaps it were better to say that the shore crept out to

meet us. A sandy cape, a small irregularly-planted patch of coconut palms, long-fronded, yellow-centred, grey of trunk and with an air of age, and a betel palm or so standing slender and straight, spruce as gallants, these first met the eye. There came into view among them a yellow reed hut built on stilts half over the water, and a grey, unpainted dug-out. But still no sign of life.

The white sheds and corrugated roofs that were Brooketon Wharf now looked far away. We rounded the cape and they disappeared. Ragged hills crested with palms and clumps of trees rose from the water ahead as we slid onward close inshore. The air grew cooler. Zephyrs ruffled in patches the surface of the lagoon-like estuary. The yellow sun sank lower in the sky. Its deepening rays lent to the landscape an almost funereal appearance. The hut with its palms disappeared from view.

Now the long-haired savage at the stern uttered a monosyllabic remark, and he and his friend at the bow paddled the canoe straight for the bank. This they did without any pretence of asking my permission. Although I was hiring the boat, they treated me as if I wasn't there.

My sense of loneliness increased to an alarming extent. I grasped my gun and tried to look both ways at once. The bow of the boat crashed through the low trees that overhung the bank. The nearest savage leapt ashore sword in hand.

I heard him busy among the trees.

Presently he came back, bearing nothing more ghastly than a bunch of bananas. We resumed our journey. Both savages ate bananas as they paddled. They still took no notice of me. Although I had hired the boat, bananas were evidently not for me.

Our course still lay close to the bank, so close, indeed, that from time to time the boat grazed the bushes; but presently we turned at almost a right angle and stood across the water towards a small island. When within a few yards of this island the paddlers again turned the boat, and we continued our former direction. I got a good view of the island as we passed. I saw that it was a pile of big sandstone rocks covered with black earth on which grew many splendid trees, long yellow grass and thickets of low thorny palms. I saw a white pigeon orchid spraying like a waterfall from one huge trunk. Beneath it was still a stranger sight. On a big

rock half hidden by a tangle of thorny branches stood a crumbling, weather-stained tomb.

We flashed by it on the in-flowing tide, and I had no time but for a fleeting glance. And so to the end of the island, across a piece of water strewn with rocks, and into what seemed to be a river.

I took it for a river, but it might have been a narrow arm of the sea. Its width, as I remember it, was something less than half a mile. Ragged hills, covered with grass and dark green foliage, and scarred red here and there where the bare earth showed, rose abruptly on either side. And this they did which added to the gloom of our passage. They cut off the light of the sun.

But as if in compensation for this loss of light and brightness, now for the first time since leaving Brooketon I beheld many manifestations of human activity. Long fences of bamboo netting stretched out from the banks on both sides far into the water. They looked like breakwaters at first sight, but reason told me that they could be not other than fishing stakes. Soon we came across a dug-out tied to the end of one of these frail fences. Passing close, I saw the top of the simple maze into which the fish striving to pass seaward with the tide were induced

to enter. A man from the dug-out was standing waist deep in the water of the innermost chamber. With a shout of triumph he held up a wriggling fish. My savages at once forgot again why I was in their boat, and paddled quickly over to the dug-out. A figure seated in the stern, which at first sight I had taken for that of a man, coyly attempted to disappear inside the enormous straw hat it was wearing.

"Di ada takut, Tuan!" yelled the long-haired savage at the stakes, bursting into coarse laughter.

"Takut?" What was this? He was addressing me. As my paddlers were now busy looking through the stock of fish in the dug-out, and my life was in no immediate danger, I put down my gun and took to my dictionary.

"Takut" means "frightened." "She is frightened, lord," that was what the man had said. Astounding! She was frightened of me!

Well, perhaps not so astounding either. What with my topee and new khaki suit and my luggage and my gun I must have been, now I come to think of it, rather a strange sight for a Borneo lady. A sort of Martian, perhaps. I recollect that I was pained and pleased that she should be timid of me, that it was now beginning to dawn

on me that these savages were friends after all, and so while they bargained for the fish I withdrew the cartridges from the gun and put it back into its case.

Then as we paddled on, turning swiftly as youth will to see what was hid under the mushroom bonnet, I caught a glimpse of a round, ivory-coloured face, dark eyes, black hair, enormous gilt earrings, a thick strong neck, and thick lips that smiled in bold amusement, revealing ebony-coloured teeth. Down came the brim of the hat, coquettishly lowered like a flirting fan, and all that remained for me was to look at the landscape again.

It was much the same as ever, steep hills with here and there an emerald patch of cultivation, clusters of palms on the rock-strewn banks, steel-coloured water unlit by the sun, a hut or two. But canoes were becoming more numerous. Presently one passed us, rushing up river on the tide with the speed of a racing eight. A mass of brown fishing net protruded from its bow, half a dozen paddlers naked to the waist laboured at the clanking paddles, a steersman sat perched on the curved stern. They were fishermen going home with the day's catch.

In the wake of this fleet canoe we rounded a

Up a Brunei river.

A highway in Brunei.

low island overgrown with stunted mangrove, and the ancient capital of Borneo lay spread out before me.

Daru'l Salem the Malays call the place, the Abode of Peace. And certainly in that sunset the scene did not belie the name.

The sky, flaming in the west where the red ball of the sun was sinking rapidly below the feathery hills, was at the zenith thickly strewn with powder puffs of clouds. These, rosy on their western side, lay absolutely still, a painted fleet upon the pale green ocean of the sky.

The town itself, built almost entirely over the water, stood in the middle of a large, shallow lake. Its huts shone brown and yellow in the heavy sunlight. It seemed asleep. On every side, cuplike, rose gently from the quiet gleaming water ranges of low, graceful, wooded hills.

The picture of Brunei as I saw it then has remained with me in spite of all temptation to replace it with a sterner, more savage and civilised composition. And this although within a minute or so of rounding the island corrugated iron roofs, a jetty, bungalows and a factory chimney belching smoke came into view, robbing the scene of its peace and charm.

It seemed no time at all before we reached the decrepit jetty made of split palm trunks, which then formed the landing-place of our factory. Two Europeans at the sight of the boat came hurrying along and met me as I ascended the fragile landing ladder.

I had arrived at my new home.

CHAPTER IV

"WE are glad you 've come," said the elder of the two Europeans, a sallow-complexioned man in the thirties with small, deep-sunken eyes. "We can't make the cutch."

He was the manager in Borneo for the Syndicate, an engineer like myself. The other man was a chemist just fresh from a Midland university with a brand new B.Sc.

"We 've had the plant working a week," continued the manager, "and the stuff doesn't seem to be thickening a bit."

They sent up my luggage to the bungalow and dragged me into the factory—me, who expected at least a week to recuperate after my ten-thousand-mile journey from home.

The factory, except for a certain roughness of construction and the presence of details tied up as it were with string, a sight that made a professional wince, might have been in Battersea or Wigan or any other of the nerve-centres of civilisation.

First, though, for an explanation. Cutch is made from the bark of the mangrove tree. The

bark is ground up and extracted with water in vats like brewers' vats, and boiled down in large copper pans, run out into moulds, and allowed to settle. When it is ready for shipment it looks like toffee. It is used for tanning leather and dying cloth khaki colour.

This factory had just been put up. The process was a new one. Now these new colleagues of mine were dragging me round the factory to see if I could detect what was wrong.

" What can I know about it ? " I protested. " I 've had no experience."

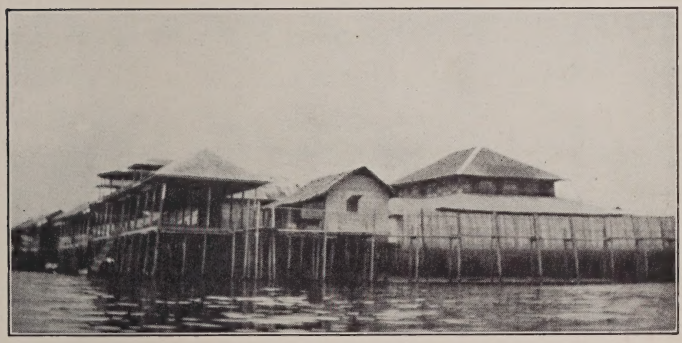
Neither had they. It was also true, as they pointed out, that they had been trying to make cutch for a week, and that it was time someone else had a shot at it.

" The cablegrams I 'm getting from the London office now," continued the manager with feeling, " are terrible. The directors want to know if I 'm having a picnic."

He had promised faithfully, it appeared, to make a shipment a month before, but owing to unavoidable delays had only just got the plant running.

After looking round the factory we all went up to the manager's bungalow for tea and for a consultation.

The Manager's house and a factory shed and jetty.



The palace of Sultan Asim.

The manager had a beautiful bungalow. Its tasteful decorations reminded me strongly of Newcastle. But I don't consider that bungalow or any other that I ever saw in Brunei was fit abode for the beautiful, courageous woman who with the intrepidity of her race had come out from home with him to share his career.

She made a difference to the lives of all of us in Brunei during those early years, and her influence on the running of the factory was immense.

The natives called her " Beautiful White Queen."

I remember still the delicious tea she gave me and her words of welcome.

At the conference afterwards :

" I quite agree with you," she said to me. " Fresh bark ought to be tried. I am sure from the smell of it that with the bark that is being used now no cutch will ever be made. It is fusty and gone bad, and so I 've always told my husband."

She was backing my views all through.

" Well," said the manager with a sigh, " if we go on to fresh bark it will mean condemning hundreds of dollars' worth of old bark."

" And," said the young chemist, " from my

tests the old bark is quite as good as the new."

"Tests!" said the lady in soft scorn. "As good as new! Can't you smell it?"

"We'll do as my wife suggests," decided the manager. "We'll use fresh bark, and as she suggests also we'll knock off the third pan of the evaporator and make the other into a finishing pan."

That night of my arrival, surrounded by dark-skinned men who couldn't handle a hammer, and were useful merely for lifting the heavy parts, I worked as I had never done before, making the alterations to the machinery. The heat inside the factory was intense, the mosquitoes came and bit us, the rain descended in torrents, rattling like artillery on the corrugated iron roof, running in streams on to our heads. When the sun was rising I screwed up my last bolt. The joints were made, the valves in their new positions. We started the machinery, we ground up the fresh, sweet-smelling red bark. And we made our first batch of cutch.

This initial success of mine and the manager's wife's did me vast good with the Malays. I was known henceforth as "the Tuan Engineer

who succeeded in making the cutch when everyone else had failed."

I have tried in what has gone before to describe the sensations of a young and ignorant man on arriving in a strange land. It is not my intention to describe the factory and my doings there as engineer and later as chemist and manager. The work there was my main source of interest during the years that followed. But there were many other things of interest in Brunei, and it is as a dweller in a beautiful country among a kindly, interesting people that I have ventured to write this book.

To begin with the nearest thing, my bungalow. I lived with the chemist in a small erection with reed walls and a thatch roof that stood on palm-trunk stilts within fifty yards of the factory. The wood smoke from the factory chimney used to blow on to our breakfast table every morning when the wind was in the wrong quarter. And as I lay asleep of nights in my hot little unceilinged bedroom the rats, stealing in under the mosquito net, would come on the bed and gnaw my toes. Cockroaches were many, but they seemed to be cleanly creatures compared with the pursy fellows one encounters at home and on shipboard, and mosquitoes

were very plentiful. The water was drawn from a near-by spring, the firewood chopped and the rubbish carried away and dumped in the surrounding jungle by an elderly, raw-boned Chinaman.

Another Chinaman held the post of cook. The cook-house and servants' quarters consisted of a reed-built shed divided into two apartments and furnished with bunks and a clay hearth. I went into this place once and found the cook sleeping peacefully in his bunk with his head on a loaf of my bread. I never went there again. It doesn't pay to investigate a Chinaman's kitchen too closely.

Every morning after breakfast this cook used to come on to the veranda armed with a large note-book in which his accounts were painted in Chinese and recite to the chemist how he had spent his housekeeping allowance on the day before. He had laid out so much for chicken, so much for potatoes, so much for vegetables, lard, oil, fish, eggs. And the chemist in his neat handwriting would enter the items in his account book and hand over the money. The daily amount spent by the cook for much the same sort of fare always crept upwards, until at last the time came when the chemist in a

A Brooketon kampong.

My old bungalow.

tone of steel would accuse the cook of being a robber, and then down would go the household expenses again.

Chinese cooks, as I found afterwards, are much of a muchness. They all consider themselves the most honest men alive; but each believes he has a right to as much money as he can possibly make out of the house-keeping. They deserve well of humanity. They are the best cooks, if they like to take the trouble, in the world.

Our gem among the servants at that time was Osman, the Malay "boy." He had only one eye, a flat nose, a budding moustache and a fat, stupid, suet-complexioned face. He was the most conceited fellow alive. The six-haired moustache adorning his thick upper lip he kept carefully waxed. He wore a pill-box of a hat set at an angle on his head, and a dirty white suit. His manner was superb. Malvolio wasn't in it.

This was the man upon whom I used to practise my Malay. I could detect from his demeanour that he thought I was a perfect fool for not knowing Malay. But then he thought everyone a fool except Osman, so that didn't matter.

I would call him beside my long chair in the bedroom of an evening and go through the few words I had learnt that day. Malay, be it said, is the easiest of languages to pick up. An average man can learn enough to rub along with in three months.

Osman alleged among other things that he was of princely birth. It is not difficult to be so in Borneo, that land of large harems, but he was intensely proud of his descent. We found it a drawback, for his princely birth forbade Osman from working hard and indeed from performing a number of necessary but menial duties at all. It did not prevent him, however, from donning the chemist's best European suit, brown shoes, and violet socks, and going off with them one evening to a dance in the town.

The chemist, waiting up nearly all night, caught the dude stealing in "with the milk." And poor Osman disappeared that very morning. At the parting both he and the chemist used Malay words that I looked for in vain in the missionary's vocabulary.

We tried other Malay boys after that. But they were even worse than Osman, and so at last we reverted to Chinese.

A more local form of plague than servants

was that of cats, domestic cats. The Brunei Malay does not care to take life unnecessarily. Any spare cats from the town in the middle of the lake were brought across in boats and dumped at the factory. There were dozens of them lurking in the jungle around the factory, half-wild, mangy, and desperate with hunger. A crash of crockery waking us in the small hours would announce the presence of one of these wretched animals in the bungalow. We would see a pair of glowing eyes up among the roof beams, hear a hungry, frightened growling. And—bang! Then a dull crash, silence, and the smell of gunpowder. It was the only way.

There were no roads in all the country. Our sole means of leaving the factory was by canoe. At sundown we shot green pigeon and snipe, plover, and even the squirrels among the coconuts. The manager and his wife had a piano. We used to go to their bungalow for music and bridge. And visitors would come from Labuan, dainty fellows from offices and the cable station, dressed in immaculate white, and pitying us heartily and audibly for having to live in such a forsaken, desolate place.

After a time, finding the life on that hot clearing in the jungle rather confining, I bought

a dug-out, learnt to paddle and to get along without capsizing. And from then onwards much of my spare time was spent in paddling about the surrounding creeks and waters and getting to know the Brunei Malays and their homes.

It was difficult at first to get to know these people, and in some ways, although I did not realise it then, rather dangerous to make the attempt. The Bruneis are Mohammedans of a mild type. But the hadjis, those who have been to Mecca, are not so mild. In a Malay nature with its dreaminess, its idleness, its belief in charms, omens, and above all its courage, fanaticism is apt to become madness at times. Looking back, I wonder what the chilly reception and restrained glances of hate which I sometimes encountered on landing at one of those little houses on the river bank might have developed into had I been less fortunate. It must be remembered that Brunei then was not under British rule, and that the Sultan and his chiefs were all-powerful. A hadji who had chosen to vent his hatred of the " kafir " on the person of a trespassing engineer could probably have done so with impunity. And had the Consul come over from Labuan to hold an autopsy

there might have been little difficulty in convincing him that I had richly deserved my fate. There would have been allegations that I had insulted a woman or had struck a man or something of that sort.

My colleagues at the factory disapproved entirely of my wandering about unescorted. They never went abroad unless in a big canoe with three or four men paddling. My paddling my own canoe, they said, tended to lessen the white man's prestige. Also, they did not think it fitting that a European should wish to have more to do with the Bruneis than was necessary to enable him to carry on his work at the factory.

There were dangers of another kind, too, they told me. The lakes and rivers were full of crocodiles, and I, unskilful paddler that I was, would stand a poor chance if attacked.

I laughed at their warnings at the time, but within a month of my taking to canoeing I was attacked. It happened, however, that I had a Brunei friend with me in my canoe, and thus was in a better position to evade the enemy.

My friend and I were coming back from witnessing the gambling at the Chinese shops. I was seated at the bow of the canoe, a tiny lamp flickering fitfully beside me, he at the stern.

The town and factory were dark and silent. There in the middle of the lagoon the night mist hung like a shroud about us. Suddenly, quietly, without the slightest warning, something huge and glistening rose from the black water within a yard or two of the canoe.

"Boya! Boya!" yelled my friend from the stern.

A crocodile was attacking us. It had tried to upset the canoe.

We paddled like madmen for about a minute, yelling at the top of our voices to try and scare the brute off. It came up again, this time closer. The soft hat I was wearing fell against the lamp and at once flashed into flame. I had been cleaning its ribbon with some sort of patent cleaner that very day, and it seemed to have rendered the hat highly inflammable.

I flicked the hat into the water as I madly pulled on. Before we knew where we were we found ourselves crashing into the forest of pandanus reeds that fringed the bank. We were safe. That blazing hat had scared off our enemy.

We abandoned the canoe and crawled back to the factory, feeling our way in the darkness past graves and stones and groves of coconut palms.

I did not say anything about my adventure to the other Europeans. My friend recovered the canoe with paddles intact at dawn next morning, so none of them had the slightest inkling that but for my economical cleaning of a soft hat I might have been missing when the time came to start work.

A few nights afterwards I was again comparatively late in reaching home. This time the manager missed me. Something had gone wrong in the factory, and he wanted my assistance to put it right. Those employed about the wharf told him that I had been seen going out in my canoe with a gun.

As I said, I had already received from the crocodiles themselves a hint that it was dangerous for me to paddle about alone after dark. So on this evening, as darkness had fallen, I managed to induce my friends to escort me home.

We in our tiny canoe were coming down a small tributary into the main river. Turning a bend, we nearly ran into a large boat. It was being paddled slowly as a funeral hearse. The paddle hafts clanked melancholily. A man in the bow was waving his lamp from side to side. Three Europeans clustered together amidships were gazing searchingly at the water. Their

faces in the flickering lamplight looked very grave.

" Hallo ! " I called out. " Lost anything ? "

They answered quite shortly. I do not believe, however, for an instant that they were disappointed not to find my dead body. But finding me so very well, after giving them all that worry, naturally was upsetting.

The head of the little kampong from which my European colleagues had found me coming was one Pangiran Piut. A man of about forty then, he was different from the average Brunei in that he had travelled much in his youth, going as far as Singapore in one direction and beyond Manila in the other. Now he had settled in his native land, where he worked as a contractor and house builder and cultivated his garden.

That afternoon I had arrived quite early at his kampong, and when the sun was sinking and my chat with the old folks and women and children was over, I had gone with him and another friend or two out beyond the coconut plantation to try and shoot a few green pigeon.

From the slight eminence on which we took up our position we looked over a large, rather swampy plain, half pandanus, half garden,

beyond which stood the Sultan's palace and the mosque on the bank of the lake.

The green pigeon came swooping along fast as driven grouse. I got half a dozen before the flighting home to roost had ceased for the evening, and we were just turning to go when out of a path concealed by reeds and long grass, as Brunei paths are wont to be, there stepped two figures.

The first was that of an old, wrinkled, mahogany-complexioned woman. She seemed very frightened and flustered. The other figure was veiled. But I knew, in spite of the gaudy silks that entirely concealed its contour, that it was the figure of a young and I could have sworn a very pretty woman.

With a cry of amazement and delight, Pangiran Chuchu, Piut's eldest son, who was one of our party, rushed down from the eminence toward the plain. I saw him respectfully greeting the old woman, and I saw him bend and with an air almost of veneration touch the orange silk garment which draped the other stranger.

Then Pangiran Piut, with an anxious look in his eyes, caught my arm and I found myself being hurried back towards his house.

His concern was very understandable. I, a stranger, had surprised a family secret which, if it reached certain ears, might involve the whole of his family in ruin and disgrace.

The facts were these. The silk-clad stranger was an inmate of the harem of one of the principal ministers of State. She was allowed out from time to time under strict guard to visit her relatives. And she and Pangiran Chuchu had met accidentally and fallen deeply in love with each other. A dangerous business in Brunei at that time, that of falling in love with a prince's favourite. It meant almost certain death to both if the secret were discovered. But they, it seemed, cared enough for each other to risk even that penalty. And their relatives cared enough for both of them to try and help them to happiness.

Piut gave me an outline of the tale as we hurried through the palms towards his house.

Afterwards I was permitted to make the acquaintance of the lady. Si Ajar, that was her name.

She met me unveiled, seated among cushions in an inner room. I remember her as one of the most stately and beautiful women I have seen. Her complexion, like that of most inmates

"One of the most beautiful women—"

of the harem, was fair as that of a Spaniard. Her face was happy then. But in her dark eyes there was a hint of recklessness and of tragedy. I did not know then what fate was to be meted out to her. It must have been instinct that made me as I looked at her feel rather sad.

CHAPTER V

FROM my bedroom window in that small bungalow could be obtained an excellent view of Brunei. When I had been in the place some months and had found out what would increase my comfort, I got in a carpenter one afternoon and made him cut out the window and part of the reed wall of the bedroom and replace it by a large shutter some six feet long by three feet wide, so that I could lie in my long chair in fine weather reading and writing with the beautiful view always before me.

I saw Brunei silver in the moonlight. I saw it basking on its lake in the stillness and heat of mid-day. On the whole, I liked its appearance best at sunrise, when thin wreathes of night mist floated over the water and the bedewed clusters of brown and yellow huts rose, half veiled, looking fresh and deliciously cool.

It was at dawn, too, that the yellow royal flag, suspended from the unpainted flagstaff in front of the palace, appeared, it seemed to me, most full of colour and the palace itself wore its brightest and most alluring aspect.

The palace allured me at all times. A life was going on there of which I knew but little. There was a court, a harem it was said of three hundred souls. The Sultan himself belonged to a dynasty that had existed for hundreds of years. The Portuguese in the sixteenth century had visited the place and found the ancestors of this very man ruling over a prosperous country full of plantations and pepper gardens, and a city rich with the spoils of the Eastern Archipelago.

All this alien life, full of oriental colour and dignity, was going on within a few hundred yards of me. I longed to know something about it. I should like, I thought, to live it for a while.

My opportunity came one Sunday afternoon.

The manager had taken his wife to Labuan in the launch for the week-end, and I was left in charge. We had stopped the machinery on Saturday night. The morning had been devoted to making a few necessary repairs. I got these done early, bathed, dressed, had the usual Sunday curry tiffin, and then, robed in sarong and singlet, got under my mosquito net for an hour's siesta. The flies buzzed in

the afternoon heat, the mosquitoes pinged in the shadows. I dropped gently off to sleep.

To be disturbed during such a golden hour is enough to try the temper of any man. I felt irritated when our new Malay "boy" woke me, and glared sternly at him through the mosquito net. He kept his countenance, however. I suppose he always will do, although, as I often thought, it would have been to his advantage to exchange it or get rid of it somehow. This new "boy" of ours was the champion ugly "boy" of Borneo. His name was Damit. I have often wondered since if that was what his father said when he saw him first.

"Well," I asked, "what is it?"

"A man from the palace wants to see the Tuan."

I went out in some excitement to look at my visitor. The Sultan I knew always employed his relatives as messengers. He had so many of them. This one I judged to be quite an unimportant person, perhaps the second cousin of the fourteenth wife. Near relatives of the Sultan had visited the factory before. I had seen them in the manager's office, sitting in turn on all the chairs, pawing over the books and papers on the table, coughing, expectorating

liberally on the floor and trying generally to give us the idea that they were used to the customs of the white man. Now this one was sitting gingerly on the knobbiest corner of a couch and was behaving quite nicely.

He arose gladly on my approach and warmly shook my hand. I waved him back to his seat, and drawing up a chair waited for him to begin.

He said: "The Sultan is very fond of you."

I said: "I am very fond of the Sultan."

He said: "The Sultan is so fond of you that he wishes to see you at the palace for a few minutes."

Naturally I was delighted. I went into the bedroom and dressed hurriedly. We went down to the river bank and got aboard the dug-out the messenger had brought. Our crew, a twelve-years-old boy, who appeared to be dressed in his father's pocket-handkerchief, squatted in the stern and brandished an enormous paddle. The canoe shot out towards the palace.

My friend and I employed our time during the journey in paying each other compliments in the best Malay style. The huts of the town were at this time of day almost deserted. Brunei was at its siesta. The palms on the bank and

the yellow royal flag drooped in the fiery sunlight.

We reached the palace. My friend assisted me up the frail wooden landing stairs. We walked along deserted jetties floored with the split trunks of palms. My friend gripped my arm and turned me sharply to the left—the right, I believe, leads to the harem. I found myself in the throne-room. I caught a glimpse of a throne. From its colour and design it might have formed part of a circus roundabout. I saw rough plank walls draped untidily with turkey-red cotton. I was ushered into the presence chamber.

It was a small room, mean and windowless. Smoke from the lamps of many councils had blackened the roughly-boarded roof and grimed the mat-hung walls. An insurance almanac, hanging appropriately enough on a rusty coat of chain mail, and a green-topped office table looked queerly out of place in the scene.

So far, except for the messenger, I had not seen an inmate of the palace. But now a curtain was flung back and a man stepped out and took a seat on the bentwood chair opposite to where I stood. He was an old man with a face full of character, broad shouldered and of middle

height. His features generally reminded me of the pictures I had seen of Gladstone. He looked anxious and ill, I thought. His dress consisted of a small turban of yellow silk only partially covering his shaven head, a blue European pea-jacket, a sarong, a singlet, and linen trousers.

" It is the Sultan," whispered the messenger.

I bowed low. He held out his hand, gripped mine and kept it within his own for a while. I felt his old brown eyes wandering over my face. He was weighing me, considering me, thinking whether or not he could trust me.

" Yang di Pertuan is well? " I asked, embarrassed.

" Well, Tuan."

There was another uncomfortable silence for half a minute. The Sultan broke it.

" The Tuan Bezar [*manager*, literally *Big Lord*] and his mem have gone to Labuan? "

" They went yesterday, Sultan."

" And you are an engineer who has just come from Europa? To what kampong do you belong? "

" To the Kampong London," I answered. He had no idea of the size of the village of London, I apprehended.

" The Tuan Gubenor of Singapore also

belongs to the Kampong London, O Sultan," came from behind the Sultan's chair.

I saw five or six wizened faces peering from the twilight of the background.

" I am glad you have come," said the Sultan simply. " News has been brought to me that you are clever at the business of making cutch. I hope you will dwell in my kingdom in safety. . . . But it was not for this only that I summoned you," he added. " A steamer has brought me letters from Labuan, and my secretary, who speaks and reads English, is very ill with fever. I wish you to tell me what they are. Here is one."

He drew it from the pocket of the blue pea-jacket and handed it to me. The envelope bore a blue American stamp and was addressed to " The Chief of the Fire Brigade, Brunei."

I told the Sultan this.

" But there is no one of that name here," he said pathetically.

" It is a title that can be retained by Your Highness," I said, and showed him the advertisement within and explained the picture on the front. There was another letter, too, from Singapore, written in English in the most flowery language. A Eurasian firm wanted the

monopoly of gin in the state, and were prepared to pay a most inadequate sum for it.

"And would you grant it to them?" the Sultan asked.

I shook my head with decision. There came a silence.

Then the Sultan asked:

"Who has the most ships of war, England or Germany?"

I satisfied him on this point.

He thought awhile.

"I have lost my telescope," he told me. "I laid it aside a few days ago and when I looked it was gone."

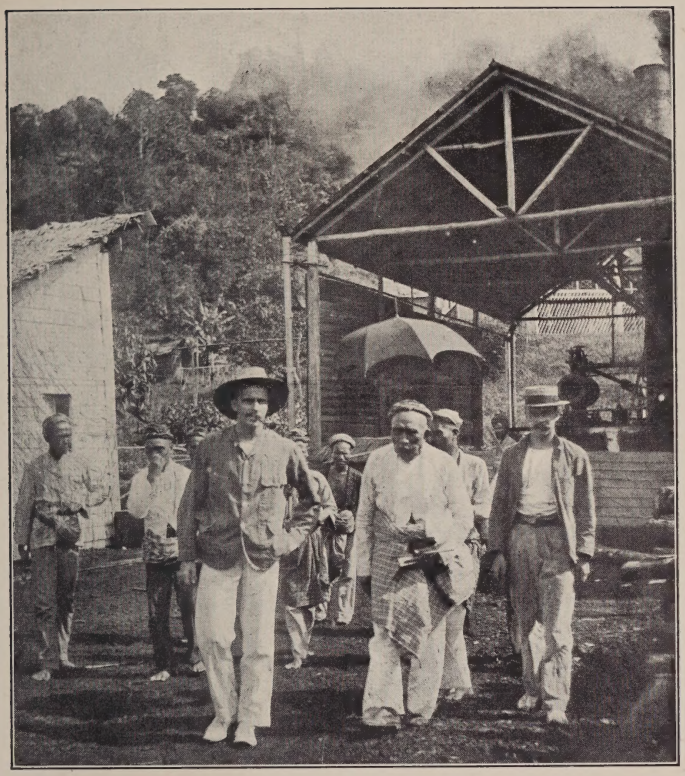
"I have a telescope," I said without hesitation, "and if Your Highness will accept it my heart will be glad."

I sent the telescope to the palace on my return. Next day a messenger from the palace brought me a beautifully engraved kris.

This interview with the Sultan was the first of many. He had sent for me that day with the evident intention of seeking what manner of man I was. That conversation gave me an interest in and respect for him that I never lost. He was then over seventy, and if one chose to believe all one heard, his record was bad

indeed—a blood-stained youth, an unscrupulous manhood. No one had ever questioned his bravery. But what was the use of bravery to him now? Cunning, a knowledge of the world and of the ways of European concession hunters, these would have stood himin better stead. They took advantage of his need of money and his ignorance to swindle him out of his possessions. One man before I came to the place obtained a monopoly for a certain article. He told the Sultan that a true Sultan ought to have his own postage stamps, persuaded the Sultan to accept payment for the monopoly with stamps at their face value which he got printed in Germany for a trifling sum. The Sultan instituted a post office, but the outside world, of course, would not accept his stamps. Another man told the Sultan he ought to have a coinage of his own, and paid for a concession he had obtained in copper cents which he had bought in Birmingham. Those cents were in use in Brunei when I arrived there.

Naturally all my interviews were not of this unofficial kind. I was afterwards sent for and officially received in the throne room, where the Sultan introduced me to his principal ministers of State. The Bandahara, or Prime Minister,



The Sultan pays a surprise visit.

a jolly-looking elderly Malay with a face something like George Robey's; a pale, dignified gentleman dressed in black, the Permancha; the Joattan Abu Bakar, the richest man and principal money-lender in the town; and the Laksamana, or Admiral of the Port. I looked at this last minister with interest. It was a near relative of his who had possession of Si Ajar, the beautiful woman with whom my friend Pangiran Chuchu was in love.

On that occasion the Sultan's attendants gave me a long, ceremonial cigarette and lit a huge, beeswax candle and placed it by my side. The talk ran, as it will in Malay circles, on the general shortness of money. I, not knowing at that time the profession of the Joattan, said frankly that if I were a Sultan I should remedy an empty purse by putting a tax on all money-lenders. The suggestion was coldly received, all the company being probably in the Joattan Abu Bakar's toils. I don't think the Joattan ever forgave me for my advice that day.

On leaving the palace after the interview a middle-aged Malay with eyes that glittered strangely seized my arm and made to draw me through a doorway, meanwhile uttering fiercely some unintelligible words.

I observed that he wore a hefty-looking sword, and resisted to the utmost. We were parted. Those who parted us explained in a whisper that the fierce stranger was the Pangiran Muda, the heir-apparent, and that he was, unfortunately, weak of intellect. He meant me no ill, they went on to say after exchanging a word or two with him. He merely wanted to ask me if I would obtain for him a few planks, as he was going to build an annex to his house.

The high offices held by the Sultan's principal ministers of State were in many cases hereditary, and for this reason among others the reign of my new acquaintance the Sultan had not been a happy one for him.

His predecessor, the Sultan Mohmin, had died of cancer at the age of one hundred. This man's son, named Pangiran Muhammed Tujudin —nicknamed Binjai or " the idiot "—was half-witted, and according to Brunei law could not succeed to the throne. The succession, therefore, would have fallen to either of the Sultan's nephews and principal ministers, the Pangirans Bandahara and Di Gadong. These two powerful feudal princes had large followings, and had either of them succeeded civil war in Brunei would have broken out. To avert this Sultan

Mohmin before dying nominated the third minister, Pangiran Tumangong Asim, the head wazir, to succeed him.

This action gave great offence to both claimants, all their followers and most of the people of Brunei. The new Sultan could not deprive the two claimants of their high office. He had no money to keep up his dignity, as he inherited no property from his predecessor. He had, therefore, to raise money where he could, and European adventurers took full advantage of his misfortunes. When I arrived in Brunei he was heavily in debt and almost without means of support. If he had been given a fair chance he certainly would have been a great king.

His sovereign rights to various revenues were all mortgaged. The feudal right, that is to say the right to tax the land and the produce of the various districts, belonged to the feudal lords, the Pangirans. The state was run on a system like that which existed in England in the Norman times.

I should not myself have cared, much as I love the jungle, to have lived with two or three wives and a family of beautiful daughters on, say, the Limbang River next door to Brunei fifty or sixty years ago. It was the custom of the

feudal lord of the Limbang River, whenever he was short of money or food or inmates for his harem, to leave his house in Brunei, accompanied by a band of blood-thirsty followers, and go to the Limbang River and seize what he required, in accordance with his legal rights. The father of a family of beautiful daughters, accordingly, was a marked man, and would be certain to receive a call from the feudal lord. Even now there are some old retired feudal lords living in Brunei who sigh for the good old days. The fathers of families of beautiful daughters up the Limbang River are, of course, all dead long ago.

I found out a good deal about the rights of the Sultan's principal ministers and feudal lords. But I could never discover what were their duties. The principal one, so far as I know, seemed to consist of being on the spot in order to take care that they got their share of any spoil that was going.

The Permancha and the Bandahara were next-door neighbours to the Sultan. Nobody could go into the palace without their knowing about it and sending a spy along to see what was in the wind. If the Sultan wanted to receive any money without sharing it out, as he always

did, he had to make arrangements to receive it in the dark. In all his negotiations with the neighbouring states these principal nobles pressed and hampered him. He owed them so much money that at last he got to the condition of being dependent on them. Had he not been a man of exceptional strength of character he must have been deposed early in his reign.

CHAPTER VI

THE State of Brunei in 1851 was nearly as large as Great Britain. It is now about the size of Cornwall and Devon combined, the rest of its former territory being in the occupation of the British North Borneo and Sarawak Governments. Brunei, known as the Venice of the East, can thus be more appropriately called the Vienna of the East, the biggest Malay city of the world and the capital of a Sultan having only a little bit of country left on which to support its dignity. And the sort of country which has been left to the Sultan of Brunei is shown by the distribution of the population of the state. Out of a total of 21,000 people 14,000 live in the town of Brunei and its immediate neighbourhood.

The Bruneis are intensely patriotic and are very proud of their city, which they say is unique, being built almost entirely over the water, The lower classes, although their increasing poverty might have told them that the trade and prosperity of the city had gone, do not seem to

realise that their country has been taken from them. But the upper classes, the Pangirans, mourn the loss of their former greatness and wealth. When I came to Brunei first it was a usual subject of discussion among the Europeans which of Brunei's neighbours, Sarawak or North Borneo, would absorb the city and the miserable little territory which was all that remained of the once mighty Brunei sultanate.

Betting was in favour of Sarawak. The Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, had acquired territory all round Brunei, and it was difficult to see what could keep him out. Most of us were in favour of the Rajah succeeding in what we thought was his ambition. He was a most able and enlightened man and a true friend to all the Malays. His government, administered by Englishmen of the best class, is a model to the civilised world. Taxation is very light, and most of the revenue derived from it is spent on the country. I believe the Rajah during his lifetime, although he owned a rich country nearly as big as England, drew from it for his personal expenditure a mere two or three thousand a year.

We should have welcomed the rule of this great man in Brunei, and indeed we looked forward

to it as inevitable. The Malays of Borneo, including most of the Bruneis, loved him, and with reason. To tell what he and his uncle the first Rajah did for them and for Borneo is to tell the later history of Brunei. Here in a few paragraphs is the rather misty beginning of that history.

Kubla Khan is said to have invaded Borneo in 1292. That a province of the Chinese Empire was subsequently established there can be inferred from the names of rivers and mountains in the island and the discovery of many ancient Chinese remains, such as jars, beads and coins. From one of the Borneo rivers came the Chinese wife of Ackmed, the second Sultan of Brunei.

The highest mountain in North Borneo is named Kinabalu, a Chinese word which translated means the Chinese Widow. Brunei tradition states that in early days there was on the top of this mountain a precious stone guarded by a dragon, a stone of which the Emperor of China ordered two of his ministers to obtain possession. Numbers of Chinese were devoured by the dragon without the stone being obtained. Hence the name the survivors gave the mountain.

The name of one of the ministers sent to obtain the stone was Ong Kang and of the other

Ong Ping Sum. The latter had recourse to a stratagem. He made a box with glass sides and placed a lighted candle therein. When the dragon went out to feed he seized the precious stone and put the lamp in its place. We can picture him hiding behind a rock on the mountain-top waiting for the dragon to go forth to feed. The stratagem, says the legend, was successful. The dragon on coming back mistook the candle for the stone.

Having obtained possession of the stone, all the junks set sail for China. On the way Ong Kang asked Ong Ping Sum to give him the stone. Ong Ping Sum at once turned very sulky and, out of humour, refused to return to China and made his way to Brunei. On arriving he espoused the princess and obtained the title of Sultan Ahmat.

Then, continues the legend, a sheriff named Alli came from Arabia and married the beautiful daughter of Ahmat. He became Sultan, established the Mohammedan religion, and made the Brunei Chinese build a stone fort. From these people, through some twenty generations, was descended the Sultan of Brunei, with whom I had the interviews told of above. If Brunei history can be trusted, most of these intermediate

Sultans, though eccentric of disposition, were very fine fellows. There was the Sultan Abdul Kahar, who fought and was defeated by the Spaniards. There was the Rajah Sakem, whom the history states to have been very severe and bold. He was in the habit of seizing any of the nobles' daughters who happened to take his fancy. He seized one while she and her husband were seated together in public state just after their marriage ceremony. This made the Rajah Sakem rather disliked, it appears. But he retrieved his honour nobly. The Spaniards again attacked the town, and all the inhabitants fled except Sakem and a thousand male slaves, who built a fort and put up a fight. The Spaniards fled, and Sakem, having established his brother on the throne, left Brunei and killed two princes whom he did not care much about.

This brother of Sakem's, the Sultan Saiful al Rajah, invested his unborn child, whom he guessed to be a son, with the insignia as heir apparent. The child, unfortunately, when born proved to be a deaf and dumb daughter. What the Sultan said when this occurred the history does not state. But the daughter was not wasted. A prince named the Long Prince appeared on the scene, married the deaf and dumb princess,

and gave her three hundred slaves. The highest title in the land was bestowed on him as a reward for his enterprise, and his son became Sultan.

This son was known as " the Sultan who fell on the Grass." I quote from the history where it explains how he obtained this title :—

> " One day the son of the Sultan killed the son of the Bandahara (Prime Minister). When the Bandahara saw his son killed without just cause he insisted on an audience with the Sultan, accompanied by forty of his relatives, with a determined attitude.
>
> " On arriving at the Hall of Audience he found the Sultan's son having an interview with His Highness. He made obeisance to the Sultan and said : ' Oh, my Lord of the Universe, what has my Lord's son done in killing my son without a cause ? If my Lord will not judge in this matter my Lord will become a Rajah without followers, because all my Lord's subjects say that seeing that even my son is killed much more may other people's sons be killed, and eventually the country of Brunei will be desolate, for all my Lord's subjects will take themselves hither and thither.'

When the Sultan heard this he replied: 'Oh, Pangiran, if a murder has been committed without just cause, even though it were mine own son, he should be killed also.' When the Sultan's son heard this he arose and went into the palace. The Bandahara replied: 'Yes, my Lord, if the Lord of the Universe thus judges, it were well that Your Highness should destroy your son altogether.' Then the Sultan said: 'Oh, Pangiran Bandahara, how can it be imagined that I can give up my son? For my son has carried the blood of the dead into the palace.'"

The Bandahara, on hearing this evasive speech, wasted no more time, it appears. He and his followers rushed into the palace, and as they could not find the son, they slaughtered many of the inhabitants.

"On this," proceeds the history, "the Sultan said reprovingly, 'Oh Pangiran Bandahara, what work is this? One man is guilty. You kill others.' And the Bandahara replied, 'My eyes are giddy.' Then the Sultan observed: 'If that be

so, finish me too.' 'Good, my Lord,' replied the Bandahara and carried the Sultan out on to the grass and respectfully strangled him with a cord. Hence the name 'the Sultan who fell on the Grass.' "

The Sultan's sons were so annoyed at what had happened to their father that one of them took the royal crown, stuffed it into a cannon and fired it into the sea. Riots ensued in the city for some months after that. The Pangiran Bandahara, accompanied by his doughty followers, again sought the palace and made the following complaint to the new Sultan, the person who fired away the crown.

" O, Your Highness, why do we all have to keep watch every night and cause trouble to the people? It is difficult also to obtain food, for Brunei is a big city and robbers can easily enter it and escape. In our opinion it is better that Your Highness should remove to Pulau Chermin, near the sea [the island with a tomb mentioned in Chapter III] because it is an island, and so, if they have no boats, thieves cannot get there."

The Sultan, in spite of his daring deed with the crown, meekly removed from Brunei. Whereupon the Bandahara at once proclaimed himself Sultan.

Civil war ensued, and it is stated in the history that the Sultan who removed to the island was eventually strangled in a mosque.

Europeans had already visited the state when these events occurred. Pigafetta, the Spaniard, was the first to arrive. In 1521 he found a hundred thousand people in the city of Brunei. A Roman Catholic mission was established there in 1691. The Spaniards, after being defeated by the Rajah Sakem as detailed above, came back and, according to their own historians, took a fearful revenge on the place. The power of the Spaniards and Portuguese in these waters was replaced by that of the Dutch. When the East India Company came to Borneo in 1770 the population of Brunei had shrunk to forty thousand.

The settlement established by the company in North Borneo was soon destroyed. It was attacked by the pirates, who now in increasing numbers were infesting these seas. So great did the power of these pirates become later on that the prosperity of the whole of North

Borneo was affected. Brunei town in 1840 was only a shadow of its former self. Its population then numbered fifteen thousand.

It was then that the first Rajah Brooke came to Sarawak in his yacht the *Royalist*. He found a rebellion going on there, and took the side of the Sultan of Brunei. We get to know with great accuracy from the records Rajah Brooke has left what sort of people were the ancestors of these Brunei Pangirans who now swagger round Brunei as proudly as if they were descended at least from Moses. There seems no doubt at all that these ancestors were a very bad lot. As Mohammedans they were contemptuous of the other inhabitants of the country, the Dyaks, Kayans and Muruts. They showed their contempt for these other inhabitants in a practical way by buying all their goods, such as rice, birds' nests, wax, jungle produce, boats, and clothes at prices fixed by themselves. To emphasise this contempt still further they weighed all of this produce that required weighing on scales of their own construction. Common sense told them that people without goods could not support families. So they seized the women and children of these other inhabitants and sold them into slavery.

The Sea Dyaks finally became incensed and turned pirates. Whereupon the Brunei princes, with a keen eye to business, furnished them with boats and weapons and made them work at piracy on their behalf.

In ways such as this, the first Rajah Brooke found, were the nobles of Brunei ruining their own country. The rebellion in Sarawak was that of the inhabitants against their Brunei oppressors. Muda Hassan, the representative in the country of the Sultan of Brunei, and the chief of these oppressors, offered Rajah Brooke the country of Sarawak with its government and trade if he would aid him in putting down the rebellion. Thus did the Brooke family establish itself in Sarawak. The Brunei nobles repented of their bargain afterwards and tried to shuffle out of it. But Brooke had helped them for the country's good, and would not hand it back to their misrule. He offered it instead to the British Government, free of all cost; but Borneo was such an unpromising land at that time that those in authority at home looked the other way. Brooke, misrepresented at home, set himself to bring prosperity to this new country of his and suppress piracy. Luckily in those days there were in Borneo no be-spectacled

bureaucrats from examination rooms to intrigue against Brooke. The country was too dangerous then for such as they.

Sir James Brooke was one of our greatest Englishmen. Assisted by a few others of his race, who gave themselves to the service without thought of reward, he pacified Sarawak. Daily it grew more prosperous. The tribes in the country adjoining his territory clamoured to come under his rule. But he was no usurper. He bought with his own hard cash the country he acquired from the Sultans of Brunei.

In the suppression of piracy round the coast of Borneo Brooke had the invaluable assistance of Captain, afterwards Admiral, Keppel. The H.M.S. *Dido*, with Captain Keppel and the Rajah on board, cruised on the coasts of Borneo in 1843. The pirate vessels the ship had to meet were sometimes as much as ninety feet long, armed with brass guns and provided with double tiers of oars. Some of the pirate fleets were composed of as many as two hundred vessels. They would descend on the coast, sack and burn the villages, slaughter those who resisted, and carry off men, women and children. Slaves caught on the east coast of Borneo would be sold on the west coast and *vice versa*. Some

of these fleets were subsidised from Brunei. The temerity of the pirates, owing to the little resistance they met with, was remarkable. Listen to this account of what occurred on the *Jolly Bachelor!* A small gunboat was the *Jolly Bachelor*, and she was on her way from Singapore to Sarawak under charge of Lieutenant Hunt :—

> "The moon being just about to rise at 3 a.m., Lieutenant Hunt happening to awake, observed a savage brandishing his kris and performing his war dance on the bit of deck in an ecstasy of delight, thinking in all probability of the ease with which he had got possession of a fine trading boat and calculating the cargo of slaves he had to sell, little dreaming of the hornets' nest into which he had fallen. Lieutenant Hunt's round face meeting the light of the rising moon without a turban surmounting it was the first notice the pirate had of his mistake. He immediately plunged overboard. . . .
>
> "Lieutenant Hunt found two large praus pressing him, one on each bow. . . . Under the fire from the brass guns the sailors got out their oars and pulled the *Jolly*

Bachelor clear. Marines with rifles prevented the pirates from reloading their guns. Round shot and grape shot from the *Jolly Bachelor* told with fearful effect. One pirate prau blew up, but the other succeeded in making her escape, for these were the days of sail, and a gunboat lacking a favourable wind was at a disadvantage."

A few months after this scrap with the pirates took place we find Rajah Brooke again in Brunei. This time he was the bearer of a letter from Queen Victoria to the Sultan, in which she asked for the Sultan's assistance in the suppression of piracy.

The Sultan, on the letter being translated to him, stared at Brooke in astonishment. His action cannot be wondered at when one considers that he was deriving quite a good income from piracy. But there was a party in the State, led by the Sultan's uncles, Pangirans Barudin and Muda Hassim, whom Rajah Brooke had previously assisted in Sarawak, who favoured the suppression of piracy. They too had stood listening to the contents of the letter, and Muda Hassim said at once :

" We are greatly indebted to the Rajah

Queen. It is very good." On which the Sultan, recovering his presence of mind, echoed, " Good, very good ! " as did one Pangiran Usop, who at that time was the representative of the pirates at the Brunei Court.

When the Rajah left Brunei the Sultan told his two uncles he was extremely irritated with them. This irritation must have increased to the breaking-point when the British, five hundred strong, attacked Pangiran Usop's pet pirate settlement in Marudu Bay, not far from Brunei, and captured it, inflicting great slaughter. But the uncles were men of influence in Brunei at that time ; so the Sultan, Omar Ali Saifudin was his name, had his old friend Pangiran Usop strangled.

But he did not forget his uncles. The loss of his income from piracy preyed on his mind. Choosing a favourable moment, he secretly sentenced them to death, and at once proceeded to carry out the sentence. Silently and simultaneously well-armed bands surrounded their houses in Brunei in the dark. Barudin fought like a hero. His followers were cut down. His sister and a faithful concubine fought by his side, together with a young slave named Jappar. Desperately wounded, his left wrist

broken, his body streaming with a dozen wounds, Barudin at last retired into the recesses of his house with the women and the boy, applied a match to a barrel of gunpowder and blew himself and them into pieces.

Muda Hassim, a man of a different temperament from his brother, sent messages to the Sultan pleading for his life. This being refused, he turned his pistol on himself and fell dead.

The Sultan, delighted at his success and believing himself invulnerable, built a few new forts round Brunei and proclaimed that he was going to drive all the white men out of Borneo.

A British force attacked Brunei, destroyed the forts, and the Sultan fled into the jungle. He was succeeded by Sultan Mohmin. The Sultan whom I met after my arrival at Brunei became Sultan Mohmin's successor.

It is with some regret I add that my Sultan was reputed to be the son of the Sultan Omar who murdered Muda Hassim. Some of the Bruneis affect to doubt this, but I believe the Sultan himself thought he was the Sultan Omar's son. At any rate, he showed no favour to Muda Hassim's son, the Pangiran Muda,

whom many considered the rightful heir to the throne, and whom I knew in Brunei as an elderly, dull-witted man who lived in a state of great poverty in a small hut on the outskirts of the town.

CHAPTER VII

I HOPE I do not detract from the romance which surrounds this city of many waters when I say that the average Brunei citizen of the lower class is a decent, honest fellow and a hard worker. He usually possesses a fat wife, one only, and a large family, and he goes about his daily business almost as earnestly and steadily as does a similarly circumstanced person in that other capital, the Kampong London.

The question of clothes does not trouble the Brunei much during working hours. He wears a cotton coat that has once been white and a sarong—a length of calico sewn at the ends to make a petticoat—and nothing else. When he gets to the scene of his labours he puts down the coat, the pockets of which are usually stuffed with palm-leaf cigarettes, rolls up his petticoat to make a sort of loin cloth, and starts in with the zest and fervour of an American citizen.

Of course, he only exhibits this zest if he happens to be on piece-work or working for his own profit. When on a daily wage his manner

is dignified and leisurely, like that of an English plumber.

If any plumber reads this narrative I hope he will not take the above remark amiss. A member of a similar profession to his own myself, I recognise that to plumbing the motto "The more haste the less speed" applies with especial force. And I will acknowledge this also, that the Brunei worker at trades which require skill goes about his business with what seems to be a very leisurely air, even when working for his own profit.

Most of these skilled workmen congregate in a separate part of the city known as the Sungei Kadayan because a tributary of that name runs through it.

The principal trades are weaving, brass founding, smithing and silver working. In this kampong also dwell the money-lenders. There is a private causeway over the water leading direct from the money-lenders' cluster of huts to the palace and the houses of the ministers of State, an instance of good town planning which will be of interest to many European monarchs.

The silversmiths are the most skilled trades-people in Brunei. They dwell next door to

the money-lenders and make their silver work out of old dollars melted down. Some time ago, owing to the quantity of brass in the new Straits dollar, the silversmiths discarded it in favour of strip silver. This requires less labour to beat into shape, and purchasers get more actual silver for their money.

You must risk a fall in the mud if you wish to see the Brunei silversmith at work. But the sight is worth the risk. His workshop is a small hut with reed walls and a split-palm floor covered with matting. He squats on the matting, usually exhibiting a pair of large feet and thin brown legs. The implements of his craft surround him. These consist of the silver, the resin, the hammers, the punches and various wooden blocks. He beats the silver into the required shape, then takes his mixture of hot resin and other ingredients and runs it round the article. This prevents any buckling while the pattern is being put on with the punches. Putting on the pattern requires much thought, patience, and labour. I have seen plumbers wiping a joint in a London suburb looking less serious and responsible than a Brunei silversmith putting on a pattern. But then plumbers have not yet taken to horn-rimmed spectacles, whereas

the Brunei silversmiths, judging from the samples I saw them wearing, have used such spectacles for generations.

How long it takes a Brunei silversmith to ornament, say, a finger-bowl I do not know. Weeks I should guess from the rate of progress of the man I watched. His tools were of the most elementary form. He had not in his possession even a shaped punch. But the patterns he produced on the silver were delicate and beautiful.

In the old days the nobility of Brunei were the principal customers of the silversmiths. Now they are the principal customers of the money-lenders, and the silversmiths have to find buyers elsewhere.

They had already found many when I arrived in Brunei. In the years that followed they found more. Whenever the launch from Labuan arrived with a globe trotter or so on board down would come young Hadji S'Mial, the most travelled of the clan. If he got the chance he asked me who the new arrivals were, and whether they had money or not. American visitors bought lavishly and paid high rates, such as they are proud to pay all over the globe in honour of the greatest Republic the world has

ever seen. But if an impoverished man such as I took a fancy to a trinket and asked its price, out from the hadji's deep pocket would come the delicate scales, and the buyer would get his trinket at the regulation price per ounce.

The brass-founders had their establishments on the fringe of the Kampong Sungei Kadayan. Men rough of voice and fierce of demeanour were the brass-founders, independent men like the moulders of our own country. If they were not their own employers I am certain that they would always be on strike.

I as an engineer came a good deal in contact with the brass-founders. They repaired parts of machinery for me, charging what they thought to be an excessive price. But they were considerably cheaper than the European engineering companies of Singapore, who, I was assured, lost money whenever they tackled one of the small orders I was able occasionally to send them. The brass-founders were prosperous and unrefined. I believe the wife of the silversmith in Brunei does not bow to the wife of the brass-founder. In England it is the other way round.

Brunei brass-founders wore their hair short, sweated profusely, and drank a lot of water

Their children, naked except for an amulet or two, used to play in the foundries whilst their fathers worked. These foundries were built over the water. I remember their spaciousness and the excellence of the fire-clay that was used in them—it is plentiful in the valleys of the country round. I remember the moulds, dollies, and queer-shaped wooden tools the founders used, the furnaces built of native brick and clay, the charcoal, and, most vividly of all, the ingenious bellows constructed out of the hollow trunks of trees.

The Brunei brass-founders form a sort of trade guild. They have their trade secrets handed down from generation to generation. The work they produce is beautiful. In the world outside Borneo they are known principally as the makers of that much-sought-after gong the dragon gong. The elaborately patterned dragons on the face of such a gong are cast very simply. First of all a clay core is made of the shape of the inside of the gong. On this core is laid a mixture consisting of wax and resin which is modelled into the exact shape of the gong itself. The modelling having been accomplished, the moulder covers it again with clay and the whole is allowed to dry for some time.

Holes are now made as outlets for the wax. The mould as it stands is placed on a furnace and the wax melted out. The molten brass is then poured in. Brunei brass-founders with the use of this method can produce casting of very great intricacy. Their industry is growing, and will, I think, continue to grow.

The smiths are much like the smiths at home. The demand for weapons, such as krises, swords and executioners' knives, has naturally fallen off of late years, and the smiths have to manufacture more prosaic articles. But still many krises and swords are manufactured and covered with what looks like old blood stains. For are there not many wealthy and ignorant persons touring the East?

One used to be able to buy a good example of the "parang elang," or long sword, for a sovereign, and an excellent kris, black with the blood of a hundred slaves, for a trifle more. But prices are up now.

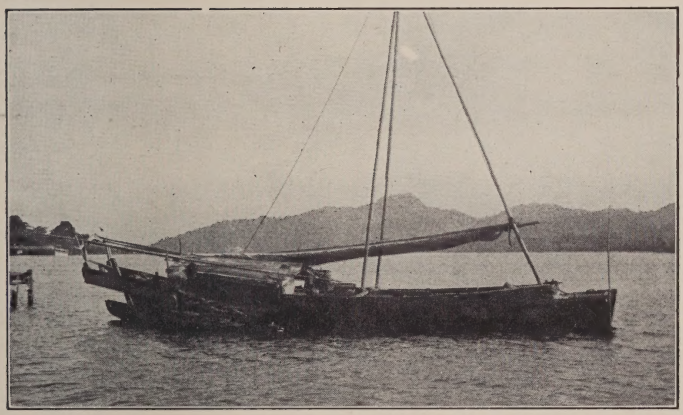
The potters of Brunei manufacture their wares strictly for home consumption. I never heard a Brunei Malay, except of course a potter, brag about the native pottery. But they do brag about the boats they build, and with reason.

The first step in building a boat is to go into

the forest and look for the ribs. Certain trees growing on swamp land in Borneo Nature seems to have designed with one eye on the Brunei boat-builder. Their branches grow bent in the form of a ship's ribs. Another instance of adaptation to environment.

When the boat-builder has secured the ribs for his boat, he hews the keelless bottom out of the trunk of a big tree and nails the ribs to its sides. Then with axes and wedges he splits the trunks of other trees into planks for the sides, bends them, hacks them into shape, and nails them on to the ribs. His principal tool for all this work is the "billion." This consists of a finely-forged blade of axe shape bound with rattan to a flexible handle and furnished with a comfortable single-hand grip. The blade is honed keen as a razor, and the skilful carpenter can produce work with the tool that is scarcely distinguishable from that done with a plane. The shell of the boat having been made, the deck beams put in and the reed deck lashed with rattan upon them, the boat-builder sets about caulking the seams with coconut fibre, and then plasters them with a resinous mixture put on hot. The mast consists of a bamboo tripod which needs no staying, the single sail of cotton

A pakaranan or fast canoe.



A Brunei boat on the lake.

cloth tanned with the juice of the mangrove tree. A big oar forms the rudder. The boat-builder does the actual building at low tide, working on the greasy black mud at the foot of his hut, while the good wife sits on the veranda above and issues instructions.

My experience of Mohammedan races has not been very wide, but the little I have seen inclines me to the belief that their men are the most henpecked creatures on earth. The average London husband disappears in the morning and does not come back till night. He is supposed to be working at the office, and his wife, busy getting through her household duties in the West End tea-shops, takes it for granted that this supposition is the correct one. But she does not know. Often she doesn't even know what her husband's income is.

I can't imagine a Brunei woman not knowing what her husband's income is and how he spends his time. If he is a silversmith or a boat-builder and does his work at home her task, of course, is easy. But the beeswax hunter, the fisherman, and the bark collector are more difficult propositions. The system that the Brunei ladies have arranged for coping with husbands in those professions is this. All

relatives are encouraged to live together in one kampong or section of the city and to be occupied with much the same sort of work. Then if a husband, getting rather tired of home life, announces that he is going out bees-waxing that morning, there is always his wife's brother and his aunt's cousin and a few more of his nearest and dearest ready to say, " Well, I 'll come too."

Nevertheless, if I were a Brunei Malay I think I should work at one of the jungle trades. Bark collecting now, there 's money to be made at that, and there are the elements of luck and adventure in it too. One evening you with a party of friends board one of the rough-built boats described above, carrying rice for a week, curry material, tobacco, coffee, and plenty of palm-leaf cigarette coverings. You take your fishing tackle and a casting net or so.

You drop down stream with the tide, wake at dawn, put up the big flat sail, and glide across the estuary just as the sun is rising behind Kinabalu, and on into the swamps. Here all is green and silent. On every side the mangroves grow fantastically. Men at the stern scull the big boat slowly inland with the sweeps. Near the fringe of the swamp most of the mangrove has been worked out. You see regiments

of decaying trees lying in the black mud stripped of bark. The young green mangrove is growing up around them. Inland towards the mountains glides the boat. The air is still and hot as in a green-house. So great is the silence that a shout echoes and re-echoes through the wilderness of trees and reeds.

Ahead lies a forest of yellowish nipa palm standing very still. The leaves are long and tapering. It might be a forest of swords. Nipa grows where the mangrove ends and dry land begins. It is now or never if you are to have any luck this trip. The oldster in charge of the party—grey, wizened, naked, and very forest-wise—points with his shrunken arm to a small opening among the trees on the left. The boat, turning sharply, glides over the glassy water and, crashing between the overhanging branches, enters a creek. A proboscis monkey, alarmed, hurries away through the foliage overhead, giving those on board just one glimpse of its golden-brown body. The crew raise a shout of delight. For there straight ahead stand a dozen immense mangrove trees ready for the slaughter.

Of course, the old leader of the party knew that those trees were there. In fact, to hear

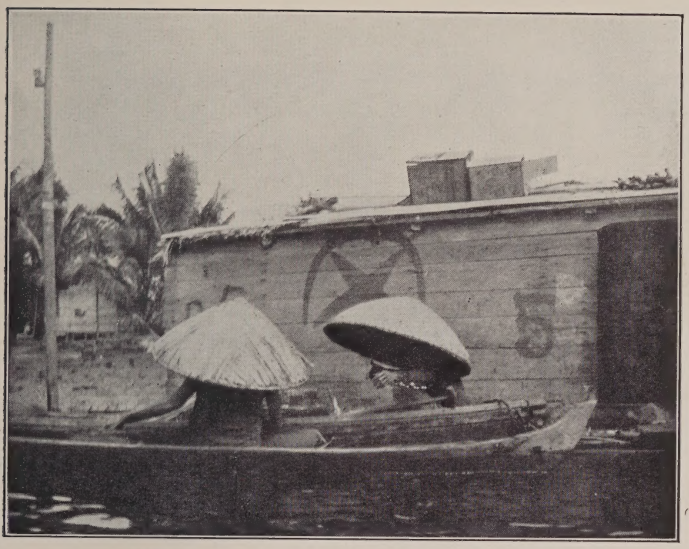
him talk you would think he had planted them himself.

No matter, let him have his brag. Here is the bark.

Breakfast is cooked on the clay fireplace at the stern of the boat. Afterwards all hands go ashore and begin on the trees. The trunks are about two feet in diameter. The tops, overgrown with ferns, melt into the dense greenery overhead.

Fantastic roots spring out from the trunk on every side, arched high above the ground. The almost naked wood-cutters, ankle deep in the black mud, tackle these roots first. With axes they assail the trunk itself. Soon the first tree falls with a crash that echoes through the swamp. The men fetch wooden mallets from the boat and hammer the bark in order to loosen it. They then strip it from the fallen trunk.

The bark collectors do not spare themselves while at work. By noon, when the sun has transformed the sultry swamp into a breathless place hot as an oven, they have stacked the red, thick, juicy bark of the first two trees on branches out of reach of the tide, ready for loading. And yet not quite out of reach of the tide, for the bark when wet naturally weighs more.



Brunei women shopping at a Chinese boat-shop.

Stripping bark in the mangrove swamp.

It is fitting, therefore, that it should be thoroughly soaked in sea water before the Europeans at the factory—unsuspecting men—weigh it and hand over its value in good Straits dollars.

The collectors, their work for the day now done, clamber back on board their cockle-shell of a boat, and after some slight refreshment and a puff or two at their long cigarettes go to sleep under the deck till the shadows lengthen and the heat abates.

Then some scull the boat into midstream where the mosquitoes are less troublesome, while others take the dug-out and paddle away through the swamp in search of pleasure. Perhaps they join another gang of collectors and exchange the news. Perhaps they collect nipa fruit. Perhaps they search for the honeycombs of the wild bees that at certain seasons are plentiful among the mangroves.

Returning at dusk, they find that those on board have got the rice-pot going on the hearth. And all collect on deck for the last and biggest meal of the day.

After another smoke, squatting about the deck in the tropic darkness, listening to the various sounds that now come from the once

silent swamp, they again seek shelter down below and drop off into dreamless sleep.

That's bark collecting! Fishing is almost equally pleasant. Of course, there is the fisherman who likes a quiet time near home. You can find him any day on the outskirts of Brunei town. You come across him sitting alone at the end of a decrepit jetty, his conical straw hat tilted well over his eyes to keep off the fierce light of the sun. He sits still as a statue, a very light spear poised in his hand. The other hand holds negligently what appears to be a line. Creep along the jetty and investigate his methods. He will not, like a Thames fisherman, look upon you as an infernal nuisance. No, the Malay fisherman is pleased and flattered that you are interested in him. He gives you a welcoming grin. Looking down into the crystal water, you perceive that he has tethered at the end of his line a fish of the goldfish breed. This fish glistens with gladness and wags its tail continually. Naturally the other fish come up to see why it is looking so happy. A slight jerk of the spear, and they know.

A sport requiring a delicate touch is this type of fishing, a game of skill, like billiards. Another method requires less skill but more

hands and tackle. Two bamboo tripods are erected in shallow water on the edge of the bank. Between these, lying flat on the river bottom, is a net some fifteen feet long and ten feet wide tied in a wooden frame. The ends of the frame are attached to ropes. The men on the tripods, pulling at the ropes say once every ten minutes, lift the net out of the water, when the third man, who has been waiting on the bank, comes forward with a hand net and scoops up any fish that may be caught.

The sort of fishing requiring most skill of all is without doubt that done with the circular net. The fisherman standing up in his dug-out when he sees the fish playing on the surface of the water throws his net so that it spreads to its utmost width and falls flat on to the water. The net, weighted on its circumference, sinks at once, entrapping the fish, and is very gently and carefully hauled into the dug-out. The throwing of this net is an art difficult to acquire to anything approaching perfection.

And there are many other ways of catching fish, with hooks and lines, and pots and shrimping nets, and traps of all descriptions placed in position in the waters about the town. Fish form the staple flesh diet of the Bruneis, and

they use every means, fair and foul, to catch them.

But when I said that I should like, if born a Brunei Malay, to be a fisherman I did not mean the sort of fisherman that hangs about the town fishing in a pottering way. I meant the fine fellow whose face and body are tanned mahogany by the sun, whose muscles stand out like knots with health and exercise, the man who with certain tried comrades takes to his canoe regularly at dusk and paddles out to fish in the sea.

I used to hear the paddles of the fishermen clanking and their joyous songs as I lay on my matted couch at night with the moonlight streaming in at the open shutters.

I used to pass them as they raced home again on top of the tide, eager to be first into the market with their catch of fish.

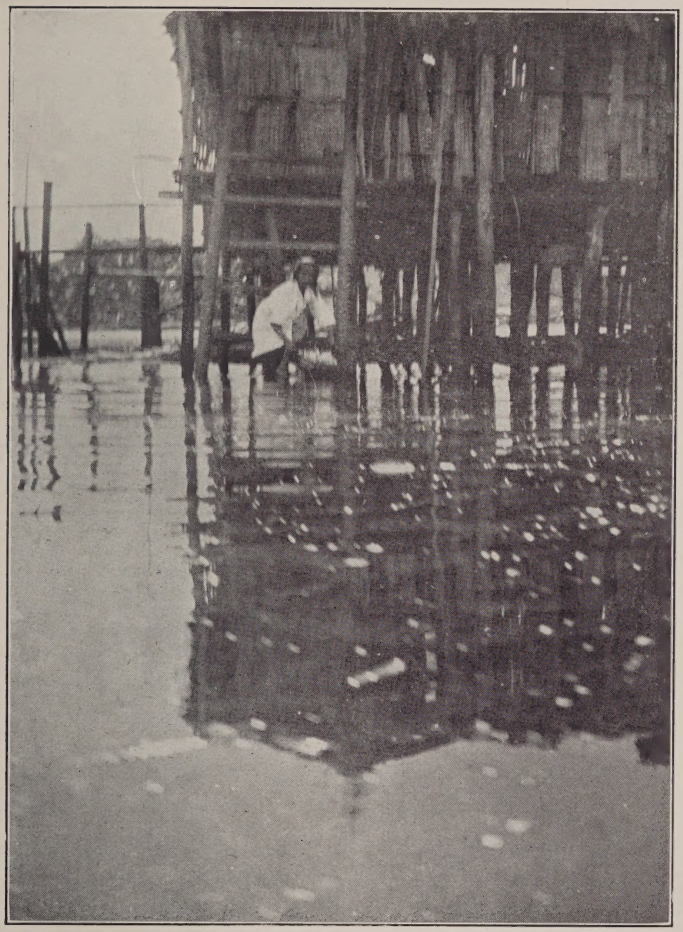
What was their manner of fishing down there in the waters of the estuary I do not certainly know. I never fished with them. But I passed often their enormous fishing traps on my way seawards, and I saw their nets and spears and the fish they caught. And I spent the night more than once in their reed shacks on the silver beaches of the bay itself, breathing the crystal

ocean air, so different from the air inland, bathing in the warm, shallow water. Salt and sea breezes, sunshine and the pure clean life on the edge of the stainless ocean ! Yes, if I were a Brunei Malay a fisherman's would be the life for me.

CHAPTER VIII

ACCORDING to plan this chapter was to be about Brunei women entirely. But on looking back I find that I have omitted to deal with certain other Bruneis of the other sex. This must have been, I think, because these other people do not follow any manly trade. But, like the middle classes of Britain, they are the cement that holds the State together, and I should like to say a word or two about them.

First among them all there is the Imaum, bless him! If he is not busy marrying folk he is busy divorcing them, circumcising them, burying them, or giving them good advice. He is the hardest worker in Brunei and very well and fat he looked when I last clapped eyes on him. A portly person is the Imaum, with a beard of the Abraham Lincoln type, a huge turban, and a long green robe. He liked me fairly well at first, I believe, but later, in my official capacity, I had occasion to condemn a lot of bad firewood which someone had sent to the factory in the hope it would pass



A Brunei housemaid at work.

unnoticed and be paid for at the usual price. The Imaum, who had secretly advanced money on the firewood, at interest, lost heavily and disliked me thenceforward.

It is strange how a trip to Mecca develops the business instinct in the Malay. Most of the hadjis I came across were usurers, and grasping usurers, in spite of the fact that the Koran forbids the "eating the flower of money," that is to say the taking of interest. But possibly these men were usurers before they became hadjis, and it was the "flower of the money" that enabled them to take a trip to Mecca.

All of the middle class in Brunei who had money were willing to lend it on security, and so were the Chinese and Sikhs. I tried to keep the men under me out of the clutches of money-lenders, as many of them were paying away half their wages in interest. But my efforts did not meet with success. The Brunei appears to think that if he does not owe money somewhere the world is out of joint. Nowadays I can appreciate his point of view. A Malay without means who is not in debt is a man of small account. But the more people he owes money to the more people are interested in him.

Consequently a man heavily in debt stands more than a chance of being a person of public importance. Whether or not by the use of such means a man could climb to high office in the State I do not know. But it is certain that many of the principal ministers of Brunei owed tens of thousands of dollars and were always eager to owe more.

The average factory coolie's system of finance was this. He would come to me at the beginning of the month and borrow half his wages in advance. Then he would go to the Sikh watchman and borrow a few dollars at heavy interest, and then on to the Chinese grocer and get his month's supplies on credit. He was then a happy man, especially if a few Mohammedan saints' days came along, as they did nearly every month, and prevented him from working and earning money to repay his indebtedness.

The pangirans, or nobles, whose rank prohibited them from working, lived, many of them entirely, by borrowing money on their lands, jewels and household effects. Some of them had come to the end of their resources. Some had in desperation even taken to work. But these were still too proud to work hard. One of them I encountered was more wily than

A lady agriculturist drying seeds.

others in his position. He was a long, white-clad slip of a fellow with a wall eye and a silver ring. He came along and tried to borrow money from me. I asked him why he did not work and earn some money. He told me with an air of pride that his three wives all worked, and that therefore he was not yet reduced to the necessity of working. He was no coolie, he said, but a man of rank. His wives were weavers of native sarongs, very good ones, too, I heard afterwards. My informant told me that the wall-eyed noble kept his wives hard at it and spent all their earnings in advance.

This trade of weaving and dyeing sarongs is the most important of the trades in which Brunei women engage. Another trade in which women are employed is embroidery and the manufacture of bolsters and mattresses. Another the preparation of the leaves of which the native cigarettes are made. Yet others, in which the lowest classes and the old find occupation, are catching with a prawning net shrimps and lauk (whitebait) and the marketing of fruit and fish.

But the main occupation of the Brunei woman is marriage and the main pre-occupation of the Brunei woman is man.

Young men, if they are constructed according to nature, are all of them, I suppose, susceptible to the charm of their companion sex, and I must confess that the picture that lingers most distinct in my memory in all that panorama unfolded to me as I came first up the river to Brunei is that of the girl under the mushroom hat, with her large brown eyes, thick, graceful, ivory arms and bold, coquettish smile.

I knew consciously then that I was in the presence of a creature very highly sexed. I saw many other women during my stay in the place. I got to know a few quite well. None of them ever forgot in her dealings with me that she was dealing with a male. He was in her eyes a different sort of male from the kind she was accustomed to twist round her little finger: he wore strange clothes, trousers, shoes, and was an anæmic-looking article altogether. But that didn't matter. Awe of him went in the first five seconds. There would be smiles, glances, tumultuous heavings of an ivory, well-uncovered bosom.

"She is very shy," my male friend would explain. I was never left alone with any of the ladies. "You see, Tuan, she is not accustomed to white men. The silly creature is afraid."

"Do not be afraid," I would bleat to the maiden reproachfully.

She would murmur something, something that sounded to my ears like a message of love.

"Interpret, please," I would say to my Malay friend eagerly.

"She asks for a bottle of port wine," my friend would explain with an apologetic grin. "Stupid creature! She forgets her manners." And he would frown at the bashful maiden.

Brunei women are very fond of port wine. It warms them up, they say, and does them good. According to the law of Mahomet no true believer is allowed to drink wine. But then, no women are allowed to enter heaven. So it does not matter much to them, I suppose, whether they break the law or not.

The young women are kept in fairly strict seclusion. They need to be. Bachelors and married men are on the prowl continually, Sir Mulberry Hawks all of them, eager to take advantage of innocence. And this innocence is not of the bread and butter order. I do not believe, in fact, it is innocence in the strict sense at all. It is merely inexperience.

There are princes on the prowl, too. In the good old days what they wanted they used

to take by force, and a " raiat " (peasant) with a beautiful wife or daughter had an anxious time. But now guile is the only way. No, I do the Brunei nobility an injustice. There is one other way, and that is ordinary, straight, decent love.

We had one case of love at first sight when I was there. It is, in some ways, a mistake for me to tell about it. The tale has not altogether the atmosphere of the harem. It might be out of Mrs. Henry Wood.

The two met first in the women's quarters of the palace. You can imagine the scene—the hot, airless room hung with silks and carpeted with mats, the semi-darkness, the scent of musk and cigarette smoke. Near the wall, reclining against cushions, squatted some of the Sultan's women. Their henna-dyed feet were visible and their graceful bare arms flashed as they moved them languidly. But their faces were veiled. For strange men occupied the corridor without, and the door of the women's quarter was ajar.

The engagement of the Sultan's grandson had been announced that afternoon, and the whole palace was buzzing with the news. Chief after chief was coming up in his canoe to pay

his respects to the Sultan, who with his counsellors and relatives about him was now seated in the throne-room dispensing hospitality.

Other visitors, friends and relatives of the Sultan's wives were coming to the harem from time to time to discuss the tidings. It was for this reason that the door of the harem was open. Judging from the noise without, even now a visitor was evidently coming down the corridor. The women in the harem raised themselves and looked expectantly toward the door.

The sound of laughter outside, masculine laughter, strangely disturbing to the guardian of a harem, caused one of the women to spring to her feet and hurry towards the door. She reached it just as it swung open. A queer sight presented itself. There stood struggling to enter the harem a girl in rich attire and of singularly graceful figure. Her veil had fallen, revealing to the gaze of all a beautiful, confused face. A young man in yellow silk had hold of the girl's hand and was trying to pull her towards him.

The tableau lasted for an instant only. The woman who had sprung to her feet parted the pair and slammed the door.

Yes, slammed it in the Prince's face! The daring young man was a prince of the royal blood, the brother of the man whose betrothal had just been announced. Who was the girl? I suppose when her veil slipped aside as she walked from her canoe to the harem and the Prince saw her face and took a fancy to it, that he thought she was some slave or other whom he, the Prince, could treat as he willed.

None in Brunei would blame him if he thought thus. Handsome, spoiled, the Prince Charming of the country, he, Prince Gawdor, had always been surrounded by beautiful women who felt any sort of recognition from him an honour.

Here was a woman different from the others. He felt piqued at her resistance. He tried to forget her. And then he found himself inquiring from the keepers of the harem who she was. She proved to be one of the common clay, not a fit bride for a prince. But she was also the Imaum's only daughter. That made the thought of offering her anything less than marriage absurd.

The Sultan held out for long. But the Prince was very much in love. He insisted on marrying the girl.

" What foolishness ! " said the Sultan to me afterwards. " The people will not understand Rajah mating with peasant. Here in Brunei we have never mixed gold with brass."

" Pangiran Gawdor said it was a new custom," the Sultan went on with a smile, " and that men who had come back from their travels reported that the world was changing, and that in Europa the mating of unequals was common. And who am I that I should resist the turning of the world ? " ended the Sultan with a smile and a shrug.

It was at the wedding of the pair that he told me this, when I was seated near him watching the arrival of the guests.

A royal wedding causes far more stir in Brunei than does a similar function in London. Although they lack newspapers there, they possess gongs. You are not allowed to forget that the wedding is coming off. The gongs at the palace had been beating in announcement of this wedding from dusk to dawn for a month. Pipers had trilled rejoicing airs on their peculiarly nerve-racking shepherds' pipes without missing a single evening. During this month a reception had been held by the Sultan every night. As each important visitor arrived slaves placed beside him a wax

candle of a size proportionate to his rank. The young men danced on the palace jetties. The oldsters chatted and played chess.

When the wedding day drew near a gun fired daily warned the bridal couple to prepare for the ceremony. Each day they were bathed in purest water and anointed with scented oil. Their finger-nails, the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet were stained red with henna. They wore white garments and ornaments of gold.

It was ideal weather for a wedding, that Friday afternoon in the middle of the month Shawal. The tide was high and the town stood knee-deep in the blue water. The flags that decorated most of the buildings fluttered in the breeze. And the dazzling sunlight bathed everything in gold—the yellow huts, the grass-clad hills, the darker tinted palms, and the perspiring crowd.

The whole of the population had come to the wedding. In boats it seethed round the spidery outwork of the palace. It clustered thick as bees on the jetties. It thronged the banks of the lake. There were market women, their faces half hidden by their enormous hats, paddling about selling fruit, packages of curried

rice, sweets, cigarettes. There were heavy, red-curtained boats freighted with the harems of the rich, and watched over by men of grave and severe countenance. The breeze, doubtless aided from within, sometimes flapped the curtains open, giving a glimpse of bare arms, gold bracelets, round, merry faces and sparkling, brown eyes. It is improbable that any of the ladies in these boats saw the wedding procession. The grand satisfaction of being able to say afterwards that they were present would, however, be theirs.

I saw the Chinese merchants of the city coming across the river in a tongkang. Their musicians made hideous music with cymbal, drum, fife, and triangle. The triangle in the hands of a Chinese bandsman is a deadly weapon. The merchants stood in a group under sun umbrellas. They wore bowler hats, emblems of respectability the world over, and smoked cigars with labels on them.

The crowd became so great on the palace jetties that as a measure of precaution men unceremoniously threw the cannon into the water. Numbers of gaily-dressed, turbaned officials now appeared, running hither and thither and issuing orders.

A very important noble surrounded by followers in rainbow-coloured garb dashed up in a big canoe. The Sultan left me and took up his position in the throne-room in order to receive him. There issued from a side door five or six men carrying on their backs shapeless bundles wrapped in bright silk. They stopped beside a large canoe, and the bundles, galvanised into life, scrambled down and got on board. These were the women relatives of the bridegroom.

Following hard after them came eight smug little girls. In their ears were earrings like gilded champagne corks. They were dressed, and they knew it, in scarlet and gold. One carried the bridegroom's betel box, another his cigarette, the rest vases filled with gilt flowers. They too scrambled into the canoe, which at once paddled away to the bride's home.

A small but enthusiastic drum and gong band, led by a man who played on a shepherd's pipe, now burst into sound. The crowd buzzed with expectation. A man bearing a lighted torch came running along a jetty and fired a small cannon. The wedding procession issued from the palace.

There were men bearing huge candlesticks

with home-made candles in them. There were soldiers in coats of mail and cotton trousers. There were men armed with lances and wooden shields. There, too, were the silken banners, the plumes, the flags and other quaint devices which had figured at the weddings of former days.

Now came the bridegroom, carried in a gilt palanquin by twenty nobles. His face was deadly pale. He was chewing something, probably betel. He wore a bulbous gold crown and on his arms gold bangles. His yellow satin costume glittered with tinsel and jewels. Last of all came the Sultan, his head sheltered under the royal umbrella, his cigarette and betel box carried by slaves.

All embarked without mishap on the wedding barge, which with gongs beating was towed by canoes to the house of the bride, where a ceremony lasting three days, which I did not attend, took place.

That was the wedding of the Brunei prince who married for love. And the wedding of a Brunei peasant is in its way an impressive affair also. I went with a friend to one by invitation. We both knew the bridegroom. Perhaps that is why I remember it so well.

The Imaum sat on a mat in the centre of a small square room droning from the Koran to a large congregation. Facing him squatted the bridegroom in his robes. Beside him was the bride's father. The Imaum ceased reading for a moment. I heard the bride's father say in a high, piping voice that he accepted him as his representative. The bridegroom began droning out something also. It was the nika, or religious ceremony, that we were witnessing.

The civil ceremony came later. Old women bathed and dressed the bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom appeared on the pathway outside his hut dressed in orange silk and cloth of gold. He was laden with jewels and tottered as he walked, it being a convention among the Bruneis that a bridegroom is faint with joy and in a sort of maze. I fell in behind the band of musicians and supporters that accompanied him. We crawled through the brilliant sunshine to the house of the bride. In the room where the religious ceremony had taken place the bride was already seated under a canopy, surrounded by girls in gay costumes, girls whose black hair was thickly braided with white sweet-scented jessamine, the favourite flower of the Malay

lover. The bride was dressed in yellow like the groom, and laden with jewels. Her face was thick with powder, her eyes darkened with kohl, her hands were henna-stained and covered with rings. On either side of her stood a little candle. The bridegroom entered and, pale with emotion, took his seat beside the bride. He sat motionless as if in a trance. An old man took his hand and pressed it three times on the bride's head. His friends then lifted him and sat him down at the other end of the room, where two small candles burned. So he and his bride would sit till evening when all the guests had gone.

I happened to wander near the bridegroom as he sat in his trance.

"Tuan," he whispered hoarsely, "there is lemonade outside."

I nodded intelligently, and he resumed his task of staring into vacancy.

The jewellery for such weddings is all hired for the occasion. The money-lenders of the town make this a part of their business.

In one of their marriage customs the Bruneis are in advance of us. After the wedding the bridegroom goes and lives on his father-in-law, if possible for ever and ever. There are

practically no bachelors of marriageable age and position in Brunei.

With marriage comes freedom for the bride. Now her parents have placed her, and the bridegroom has received into his keeping a blushing maiden in exchange for a substantial sum in cash. She is his now, and it is his business to watch her. Tropic natures quickly flame. A bridegroom's money does not last for ever. There are lovers for her if she wants them stealing in their canoes through the moonlight. There is romance, adventure to be had for the asking, intrigue, passion, maybe jealousy and death.

And so life goes on, and the children come and the bride grows old, quickly enough, for in the tropics, though the scent of the flowers is rare and the beauty of them as that of lilies, they quickly fade away.

In all too brief a time the bride figures in Brunei society as a matron, whose voice is shrill, whose charms are too mature to attract notice, and whose husband in her own opinion and that of others requires a deal of watching.

Later you find her, perhaps a granny now, skinny, yellow, grey. She talks but little and mumbles her food. Out in the dug-out she

goes of a morning sweeping the shallows with her prawning net, anxious to bring home a good catch so that her children cannot say that she is not worth her keep. She splits firewood, gathers sticks. And, proud too in her old doddering way, she sees her children's children wed. But they are not very fond of her.

That is the Brunei woman grown old. But what I like to remember is the blue water and the bright sky and the young wind shaking the leaves of the coconut palms, and comely maidens bathing near their huts, the sound of their happy laughter, and the glint in the sunshine of their raven hair.

CHAPTER IX

BRUNEI, the capital of a Mohammedan Sultanate whose fame has spread as far as Turkey, is the nearest thing to a metropolis that Borneo possesses. Men come from Stamboul and Arabia on visits to the various notables of the place, men fat and lean but all swarthy of complexion and furtive of expression. They settle in the town, marrying wives of the wealthy sort. They attend the Sultan's councils. They distrust law and order of the Western variety in particular and have not much use for civilisation as we understand it. These are the people who spread the religion of the Prophet and the hatred of the white " kafir."

Although the Sultan welcomed the Arabs, the men of Turkey and other holy strangers to his councils, I don't think he ever took their advice. He had a first-class brain of his own, and no doubt had long before taken the measure of those who had come, as they were in the habit of stating, to his aid from afar.

At the time when I first met him he had a secretary, a Malay from Singapore, who spoke

and wrote English perfectly, and who was of great help to his master in dealing with documents of State. This man gave the comparatively untravelled Sultan the aid of his experience when strangers put in an appearance and wanted something. He was a delicate-looking man, refined in manner and plausible of tongue. Knowing ones said that he had finally sought refuge in Brunei as the police of every other country in the East were after him for fraud. Very likely this was true, but he proved a good servant to the Sultan, and self-seeking strangers got very little out of the Court treasury when he was in the Sultan's service.

He and the clerk to the British Consul, who lived in Labuan and paid occasional visits to Brunei only, were men of similar education and outlook and understood each other quite well. Relations between the British Government and Sultan were then of the friendliest description. The Consul, a man who had spent most of his life in Borneo and who thoroughly understood the Malays, did all he could in an unobtrusive way to forward the interests of Brunei. What happened when he was suddenly transferred will be related further on.

Among other foreigners resident in Brunei

the most important are the Chinese. The Chinese with capital who own the shops and conduct various industrial and commercial enterprises are most of them of the Hokkien clan. They are very shrewd. The best of them are honest. My friend Si Hock was both shrewd and honest, and as his career is typical of that of a successful Chinese merchant I give an outline of an episode in it.

A young, ill-dressed Chinaman came to me as I was standing on the wharf of the factory one morning watching our cutch being loaded into the hold of a local steamer.

" I ask to speak to you, Tuan," he said.

" Well ? "

" How much does the Tuan pay for sending the cutch to Labuan ? "

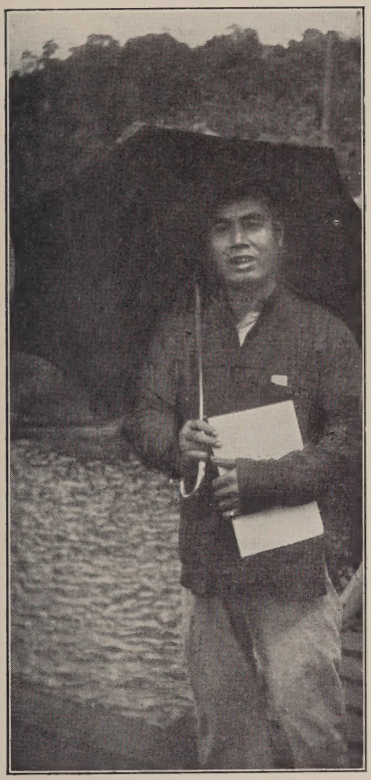
" Twenty-five cents a package," I told him.

A dreamy expression came into the young Chinaman's brown eyes. He was, I saw, doing a little mental arithmetic.

" If you will give me full loads in my tongkang," he said, " I will take your cutch to Labuan for fifteen cents a package."

" And discharge it on board the Singapore steamer ? " I inquired.

He nodded. I looked at him. Naturally



Si Hock.

his appearance impressed me favourably. I made inquiries. He was a coolie who had saved money and bought a small shop.

When I had time I took a boat and went over to the Chinese shops. They were all built over the water like the rest of the town, but the piles they stood on were of Borneo ironwood, and they had stout timber walls and corrugated iron roofs. No small undertaking for a coolie to save enough money to acquire one of these shops.

I entered the shop of the principal Chinaman in Brunei, who was our largest bark contractor, and who also took cutch over to Labuan at twenty-five cents a package.

"Have you ever heard of a man called Si Hock?" I asked the proprietor, who had welcomed me in person.

His fat face screwed up with distaste. Si Hock had been heard of, it appeared. He was, as I expected to hear, the lowest of the low. My informant pressed a Manila cigar on me.

"The tongkang he has acquired," he added apropos of nothing, "leaks badly. Also he is deeply in debt," he ended with relish, "and will soon fail."

Plainly Si Hock was on the way to do well.

I gave him the contract for the carrying of the cutch and helped him all I could.

Si Hock prospered. He bought a few bark lighters. He also became a bark contractor. The other Chinese shopkeepers hated and despised him. He was of the coolie class and the high-born Chinaman is one of the proudest creatures the other side of India.

They hated him, but they could not break him. It was touch and go once, and Si Hock was forced to come to me at night and ask for money. I lent him a few hundred pounds of my own, and he got over his trouble and paid me back.

Now comes the sequel. A dismissed employee of the Syndicate with influence over the natives went to all the big bark contractors and got up a combination against me. The first I knew about what was going on was when they told me that they were stopping work at once and would not start again unless I gave twice as much as before for the bark. I could not afford to stop the factory. The Syndicate was under contract to supply hundreds of tons of cutch all over the world. I went to see Si Hock. He grinned when I told him what had happened.

" I know all about it, Tuan," he said. " They wanted me to join them."

" I knew you wouldn't."

" This is my plan," said Si Hock. " I have made inquiries in the town. Many of the Malays are willing to sell or hire their boats to me. Give me the bark contract. I will supply all the bark you require, at four cents less per pikul than you are paying now."

" Four cents less ! " I gasped. " But they want double ! "

" I am going to teach them," said Si Hock. " I have not forgotten how they tried to ruin me. If the Tuan had not lent me money then I should have been forced to go bankrupt. The Tuan is in trouble now, and I will help him."

We shook hands on it. Si Hock got the bark contract. To help him at the outset I chartered a tug at Singapore, and we towed the bark boats to and from the swamps and the factory. We got all the bark we wanted. The boats of the other contractors lay rotting at anchor. In addition they had advanced large sums to the Brunei bark collectors, and these sums they were unable to collect. Instead of they ruining us we had ruined them. And later Si Hock bought up their boats for a song.

When I left Brunei I left my friend Si Hock in possession of the two biggest shops in the town, the opium farm, a fleet of bark boats, a pig farm, a coffee plantation, and a rubber estate. He was growing fat as butter. His pretty, small-footed wife dressed in silk. He wore—a smile of satisfaction all day long.

I shake his hand over six thousand miles of water, the best Chinaman I ever came across.

The Chinese have been in Brunei for centuries. In days gone by there was a big trade direct with China in pepper, gambier, birds' nests, tripang, dried fish, rubber, wax, sago and jungle produce. Brunei was a very great pepper growing centre then. The hills around are terraced with the gardens of former cultivators. But Brunei gave up pepper and grew pirates instead and naturally trade languished.

There is no pepper grown in Brunei now, and there are few Chinese planters. Wise through experience, the Chinese let others sow and try themselves to reap.

The Malay cuts down the sago palms in the swamps, brings the trunks up to Brunei, rasps them into powder, treads and washes out the raw sago for shipment to Singapore. The

Chinaman advances him money while he is doing this work, takes over the sago in exchange and reaps the profit on its sale.

It is the Malay, too, that taps the huge gatar jalutong trees and brings their latex into the shed in the jungle. But you will find a young Chinaman in the shed, wise, imperturbable, smoking cigarettes made of his vile-smelling tobacco, who superintends the coagulation of the latex, and the weighing and dispatch of the gatar to Labuan. Thus it is with all the jungle trades. The Chinaman has them in his grip. He is the hated capitalist battening on the fruits of the workers' toil. And where he is not there is still toil and very little to eat.

But there are very few places in Brunei where the Chinaman is not. He goes singly and in pairs in his clumsy row-boat far up the rivers, to where the savage chiefs reign undisturbed over tribes of naked brown men, where force is the rule, and a man carries his life in his hand. He visits in their fastnesses the Dyaks and Muruts and, seemingly regardless of the fact that he might pay the forfeit for his temerity with his head, proceeds to swindle every man jack of the blood-thirsty tribesmen out of his stores of gum, wax, rubber, rattans,

and other articles of value. He weighs these articles on his own scales, which all present are aware are doctored in his favour, and pays for them with tobacco, knives, cotton cloth, looking-glasses, and beads of hardly any value at all.

Sometimes the natives try to swindle him by putting stones in the middle of the balls of rubber they sell him in order to increase the weight. But their efforts at defrauding honest John are rarely successful.

I wonder far more Chinamen are not murdered. I suppose the head hunters have learnt from experience that if they murder them too often they run short of tobacco.

It has been said with truth that the Englishman is more of a trader and adventurer than an agriculturist. The same may be said of the Brunei Chinaman. An Englishman in his natural state drinks beer and backs horses. A Chinaman drinks anything, smokes anything, including opium, and gambles on anything at all. For most of the year his evil proclivities are strictly controlled by a benign Government. But on certain occasions, such as Chinese New Year, he is allowed to go the pace. He opens the proceedings with processions in which

dragons, serpents, devils and other creatures figure. He lights paper lanterns, lets off fireworks, and pays great attention to his joss. He feeds, till he bursts almost, on birds' nests, sharks' fins, duck and pork, mixed with many curious vegetables. And if he wishes he may gamble all day long without paying any fee or licence.

One of his favourite gambling games is Ti-chow. A square table has two lines drawn across its top from corner to corner. Two of the spaces thus formed are coloured red and two white. A dice, half of which is coloured red and half white, is enclosed in a plain brass box. The box is placed inside a bag and spun. The gambler stakes on either red or white. The box is put back and its cover lifted off, exposing the dice. If the white side of the dice faces the stake the bank takes the stake. If the red side of the dice faces the stake they return the stake and as much again.

"Put and Take" was a favourite form of gambling among the Brunei Chinese years before it came to England. The sides of the top used are ornamented with pictures of a fish, a crab, a cock, a prawn, a frog, a flower, a centipede and a tiger. The top is spun and covered

with half a coconut shell before it runs down. The players then stake on the figure they fancy. The coconut shell is lifted and the bank pays the winners their stake and five times more.

As was stated above, gambling is free at Chinese New Year. At other seasons it is controlled by what is known as the Gambling Farm, that is by a Syndicate of Chinese who have purchased from the Government the sole right to keep gambling tables in the state.

In Brunei, as in England, there exist certain people who object to gambling. I see from my diary that I had after one Chinese New Year been questioning my Hylam " boy " about a certain fight which had taken place over the gambling. " Lee Pow was the person who began the fight," my " boy " said. " He was accompanied by other Macow Chinese and fought the Hokkiens. Lee Pow is a poor spirited person, and unpopular among the Hokkiens, as he has regularly interfered with their gambling at Chinese New Year for twenty-five years." The Hokkiens, it appeared, were glad of the chance of a scrap. " The Hylams also," the " boy " went on, " would be glad of the chance of a scrap with an alien clan, but they are few in numbers and therefore keep clear."

I note that later Lee Pow was fined $25 for his offence.

As with gambling so with opium. In most of the Borneo countries the opium is "farmed." The farmers are usually among the richest of the Chinese, and conduct their business with dignity and decency. That few Chinese are the worse for smoking opium, and that it is better for them to smoke opium than to indulge in brandy and cocaine, is an opinion which every European who knows the East holds very firmly.

Other strangers dwelling within the gates of Brunei are the Sikhs. These big, fine fellows never get to such close grips with the Bruneis as the Chinese. They do not trade. Their favourite business is lending money. They have a religion of their own that keeps them straight and clean.

We had several Sikhs as watchmen at the factory. They were stern in their methods with the Malays, whom they seemed to hold in contempt. When they found them asleep on night duty (a Malay usually is asleep on night duty) they poked them with the long staffs they carried. The Malays in revenge used to get these staffs and grease them with beef fat.

A Sikh that touches beef fat is polluted. I have seen merry times at the factory of a night when a polluted Sikh was running around trying to find the Malay who had greased his staff.

Defects in this fine race are avarice and miserliness. They starve themselves in order to save money, and lend the money out at a monstrous rate of interest. Another defect is fondness of gin. One Sikh, a head watchman at the factory for many years, I remember with great affection. He lent his money out at interest, but there was nothing of the miser about him.

"You!" I remember hearing him say to two small Malays who had just stated that they were fond of war. "You fond of war! What do you know about war? And where are your white soldiers to lead you in war? I could bring thirty men from my country and kill all in Brunei without difficulty. You ask General Roberts if that is not so. What? Never heard of General Roberts? What then do you mean by talking about being fond of war?"

I believe that if called upon this head watchman would have tackled all Brunei single handed. He was a good man to have near one

The old Chinese shops

A Sikh watchman and some factory hands.

when there was any rioting, as I know from experience. As for sport, he was passionately fond of it. He would sit under a tree for hours waiting till a pigeon had settled on it. Sikhs do not believe in wasting powder and shot on flying birds. And he spent nights very often during the years I knew him lurking in the jungle near the haunts of the wild pig.

He was very fond of gin, was this friend of mine. Under the influence of that liquor, which he bought from the Chinese shops in square black bottles holding perhaps a quart, he would become maudlin and most affectionate. I became to him then a person very dear. He would come up to the bungalow and tell me how he regarded me. I was like, he would say, his father and his mother besides being a sort of prophet, priest and lawgiver. We put in the telephone between my bungalow and the factory. At 2 a.m. that night I was awakened by a loud knocking. Outside was my Sikh considerably inebriated.

"What do you want?" I asked sternly.

He had a lamp in one hand and his staff in the other. His bearded face, it seemed to me, wore an apologetic expression.

"I have been watching this new thing,

the talipound," he explained to me with gravity. " The Tuan knows he is my father and mother. I sat beneath the talipound waiting like a little child to hear his voice speak to me. I have been waiting for hours. But no voice came, so I have ascended to the bungalow to see if anything is the matter."

I drove him away with revilings and went back to bed. He appeared dazed at my reception of him, and next morning I had to explain the telephone to him over again. He was evidently under the impression that I had put it up so that I could chat with him of an evening.

I remember another occasion. One of the other Sikh watchmen, a big, sulky fellow, became converted to Islam. The conversion took place for the usual reason. He had married a Malay woman. Afterwards, very ashamed, and with his beard shaven off, he came back to the factory and drowned his sorrows in gin.

I with my friend the head watchman inspected him as he was lying in a canoe in the sunshine " sleeping it off."

" Pig," commented my friend. " What would his wife and children say if they could come from Lahore and see him now? And I hear that the woman is notorious for her immorality. Truly

if a man stoops low enough he will always pick up nothing but dirt."

We had a Sikh die in Brunei. His comrades cremated him. They had not tackled such a job before, and the quantity of firewood they used must have cost them a mint of money. For days a black cloud hung over Brunei. Flakes of ash from it descended so thick that I had to give up breakfasting on the veranda and have a table set somewhere out of reach of the breeze.

CHAPTER X

IF the Sikhs had been wise they would have taken their dead comrade to Labuan, where there is a big Sikh colony, and a Sikh temple with priests and other apparatus requisite for being born, married or buried.

Labuan has been a British colony for so many years that somebody must have written well about it, and no doubt all I have to say will be found stale and uninteresting.

To us in Brunei Labuan was a sort of island of the blest whither one went either to get well or to become ill, depending on the state of one's health and the season of the year. It contains mems in plenty, a doctor, a coal mine —at present out of action—Government officials, telegraph clerks, golf and race courses, tennis and croquet lawns, picture palaces, gin shops, clubs and all the other resources of civilisation.

At first the British used it as a convict settlement, but the convicts died off, the island being low, hot and unhealthy, and at present only free men reside there.

There is no industry in the place, but all the men you meet at the port, Victoria, seem very busy. They call themselves agents and exist on commissions. Their bungalows are all lumped together on the top of a small hill, so they sleep at a higher altitude than they work. This is perhaps what Singapore people mean when they say that nearly all Labuan gets slightly elevated every evening.

When I first arrived at Labuan there was a bitter feud in existence at the top of the hill. One of the Government officials bred Siamese cats. He was very fond of them. I noticed when I was staying in his bungalow that at tiffin two fowls would be brought on to the table, one of which he would cut up and distribute among his cats.

The cats, as cats will, spent their nights in romantic adventure. Their trysting spot was the garden of another Government official, a meek, much-married sort of man, and one who, it appeared, strongly objected to cats howling in his garden at night. He got out his gun and shot three.

As he said, how was he to know they were the other man's Siamese cats? They made just the same sort of noise as ordinary cats. The

other man ought to keep his cats locked up if he didn't want them shot !

The feud between these two officials and their wives lasted for years and affected the whole atmosphere of Labuan. If you went to play croquet at one house you were not welcomed at the other, and *vice versa*. The doctor had to be friends with both parties. He found it so difficult that he left his house on the hill in disgust, and retired to a small coconut plantation on the plain, where he lived a life of seclusion, punctuated with the visits of various bachelor friends.

He was a Scot and a bachelor. He hated shams and insincerity and the Government, and loved his work and his fellow-men.

In addition to his work for the hospital, the brothels and the Government he had a considerable private practice. From most of the estates and companies within a radius of fifty miles of Labuan he got a retaining fee of a few pounds a month, in exchange for which he paid regular visits and gave the staff medical attention when necessary.

Brunei did not come in his beat, but if anyone was ill there he would slip on board a launch and steam across the forty miles of

sea to visit the unfortunate with the best will in the world.

He said we ought to have a doctor in Brunei, and I fancy was rather impatient with me for running a small surgery of my own and treating any Brunei citizens who liked to come along. But he used to let me have what medicines I wanted, and if I asked him about any difficult case promptly sent a letter full of advice.

My difficult cases in Brunei, however, were few and far between. We had a man fall into a vat full of boiling liquor, but only up to his knees, luckily. We had another man who caught his arm in a bark crusher. It came out flat and long like a piece of thick tape. I put on a tourniquet and dressed the arm as best I could, and had a big canoe brought instantly with a dozen first-rate paddlers to take him over to Labuan. His relatives, however, came over in a body from their kampong and refused to let him leave. They took him home and treated him with Malay medicine. He was kept in his hut for three days. Then the head of the kampong took out his sword and cut off the injured arm, which had begun to mortify, and the poor fellow died.

His relatives expected from the first that he was going to die, and would not release him. They did not want him to die out of his own kampong.

I remember another case, this time a rather amusing one. A very dirty Malay came to me one day. He seemed distressed. He said :

" Six people are dying in my hut."

I asked what was the matter. He explained :

" We are poor people, not having enough to eat. We prayed last night to the Tuan Allah to grant us more to eat. On rising at dawn this morning and looking out of the hut I perceived growing from the earth a plentiful supply of mushrooms. These had not been there the night before. It was clear that the Tuan Allah had heard our prayer. We picked the mushrooms and ate them. Now all in the hut are in pain. Their bellies can hold out no longer because of the pain."

I went with him in his canoe to the hut and gave all the inmates ipecacuanha, with miraculous results.

Quinine and Epsom salts are the most useful medicines to have by one for doctoring the Malays. I believe in spite of these drugs that

they had confidence in me as a physician. Sometimes, however, thinking it over, I am not sure. I remember that they never came to me to be cured until after they had tried their own native medicines without success.

CHAPTER XI

THEY are festive souls, these Brunei Malays, as may have been already gathered from these pages. They stop work religiously on every Mohammedan saint's day, although most of them, irreligious fellows, do not go to the mosque once in a twelve-month. They feast for thirty nights during the sacred time of Ramadan, but take care not to fast during the thirty days, although, if questioned, they will declare they are fasting. In the daytime during those fasting days a true believer may not so much as swallow his own spittle. The weak condition the factory coolies used to get into in their efforts to be strict Mohammedans during Ramadan made one's heart bleed. The very thought of doing any work whatever caused them to faint almost.

" Sahya tida buleh tahan, Tuan. Prut banyak kosong (I cannot bear up, my stomach is very empty)," that was the universal cry in the factory during the fasting month when any hard work had to be done. How the poor fellows managed to stagger up to the pay office at the end of the

week and carry off their wages was a mystery to me. But they did, and moreover they were quite strong enough to carry away other people's wages as well if they got half a chance.

At the end of the fasting month there takes place the great Malay festival of the year, Hari Raya. During the three days which it lasts Brunei is very much alive. Feasts are held in every house, the hospitable invite all their friends to share the good things. And even Europeans and other "kafirs" are entertained royally. At night all the houses in Brunei from the Sultan's palace downwards are illuminated. The myriad twinkling lamps shining in the darkness and their reflections on the broad lake remind one of fairyland, or at any rate of Earl's Court, which to the average European exile means much the same thing.

But the Brunei Malay is not content with these official holidays. He stops work when anyone in the neighbourhood of his hut is being married or being buried.

A burial stops him for a day or two. There is not much feasting then. But a wedding will stop him from a week to a fortnight.

Our main difficulty at the factory was to

obtain a large and constant supply of mangrove bark to keep the machinery fully at work, and in order to fulfil the various contracts for the supply of cutch the Syndicate had entered into all over the world. Directors in a London office ten thousand miles away are apt to seem unreasonable creatures. When in answer to a cable, "Why are you not shipping the quantity of cutch you promised?" they get the reply: "Another marriage is taking place in the town and the bark men refuse to go away to get bark until after the ceremony," they appear to go off their heads with rage.

"Ask the Sultan to use his influence. Tell him that Griggs and Co. of Boston threaten proceedings if we do not ship them three thousand bales before December."

This is a specimen of the sort of thing the average manager in Borneo has to put up with from those wonderful people his London directors.

Of course, I never worried the Sultan with those sort of details. He would not have liked it. After all, he considered himself a king, and was not interested in trade.

If I had asked his assistance on such an occasion he would have possibly informed me,

out of his ripe experience, that there occur sometimes in Brunei events of another order than fast days, marriages, and christenings, events which cause the Malays to stop work perhaps for months together. I now was to experience one of these terrible occurrences. I remember it the more vividly because at the time I was in charge of the Syndicate's affairs in Borneo, the manager having gone to Europe on leave.

It was the irony of fate that this disaster should have happened at the very time when I was striving to increase the output of cutch in order to prove to the directors that I was worthy of the trust imposed on me.

Looking at the diary I was keeping at that time, I find this entry under the 17th day of the month Sapar :—

" Pangiran Chuchu caught his finger in the crusher saw. The saw cut the end of his finger off."

I dressed the stump, but when he got back to his hut some of his female relatives took off my bandage and daubed some Malay ointment on the wound. Chuchu got a poisoned hand and had to go to bed for a while.

We were having rainy weather at the time. The rain on the day I went along to see how the invalid was progressing fell in torrents for over seven hours, registering six inches, so I saw from my rain gauge outside the factory office. In spite of waterproof and Chinese umbrella I was a fairly damp creature when I landed at Chuchu's kampong.

All his relatives were in the hut gathered round the bed. Chuchu looked very sick, as Malays will when there is the slightest thing wrong with them. His hand was swollen. I washed off impatiently the filthy yellow concoction with which it was covered.

"Who put this stuff on?" I demanded angrily, looking at the circle of faces.

At first there was silence, and then someone in a very scared voice said:

"It was I, Tuan," and I saw Si Ajar in the dark corner shyly hiding under her veil.

"She brought it from her house," explained Chuchu's mother in excuse. "The information she received was that it was very strong."

"So it is," I returned ironically. "Strong enough to kill any ordinary man."

"Mana buleh!" said Chuchu's mother,

expressing disbelief. "The Tuan is only making fun," she remarked reassuringly to Si Ajar.

But the girl was still staring at me. An expression of horror had appeared on her beautiful pale face. It seemed to me that some unpleasant thought had crossed her mind.

"But I could trust that old woman with anything," she muttered. "She would never give the wrong medicine."

"What old woman?" I asked quickly.

"She got the ointment from the ancient one who looks after her master's household," explained Chuchu's mother volubly. "This old woman is famed throughout Brunei for her skill in medicine."

"You didn't tell her who the ointment was for, of course?" I asked Si Ajar instantly.

"Of course she didn't," laughed the old lady shrilly, looking at Si Ajar. "That would never do."

Si Ajar remained silent, her eyes cast down. I could have sworn that she was hiding something. I decided that she had told the old crone in charge of her master's harem who the medicine was for. Probably in her excitement on hearing the news of Chuchu's accident she had revealed

a little bit of her secret. Well, it was nothing to do with me. "Probably," I reflected easily, "the old crone knew about Si Ajar's liaison with Chuchu anyhow, and was making a little money out of it." There is not a more corrupt class in Brunei than the keepers of the harems.

I went home a little later, having put Chuchu's wound in order as best I could. I bathed, got into sarong and baju and had dinner comfortably. About nine I took a hurricane lamp and picked my way down the muddy path to the factory on my usual nightly visit. The machinery was running sweetly, There was a good head of steam on the boilers and the European in charge of the night shift reported that all was well.

I went up the hill again and entered my laboratory. Out of mere curiosity I had brought a little of that disgusting ointment home with me.

I lighted the oil lamp—we had no electricity then—took up a test tube, rinsed it out with weak acid, and made a solution of the ointment, just about half a dozen c.c.'s.

I took a bottle from the shelf and poured a drop from it into the tube. Then—No,

I didn't say anything. I merely looked at that test tube with horrified eyes. The ointment was bang full of potassium cyanide.

Now, how had that got there? I could have understood a doctor at home using a little potassium cyanide in an ointment. But frankly I couldn't understand a Brunei Malay using it. They dreaded potassium cyanide. There is a lot of it in Borneo. Natives get it from the gold mines. It is known all over the island as being a deadly poison.

I made another test with the same result, then locked up the laboratory and crawled homewards. I was exceedingly thoughtful.

It looked to me as if the person who mixed that ointment had made a deliberate attempt to poison Pangiran Chuchu. Now I knew at that time very little about the inside of the harems of the Brunei nobility. I could imagine what they were like. The women, noble and slave born, were kept pretty closely confined. Their very bathing-places looked like prisons from the outside. Si Ajar had, it seemed to me, enjoyed an unusual amount of liberty. This love affair with Chuchu had been going on for a long while now. It must have been going on with the knowledge of the old crone in charge

of the harem, otherwise it would not have lasted so long.

Now, if Si Ajar's owner, the Laksamana's nephew, happened to discover the liaison, dreadful consequences would follow for both the lovers. Also, because of the length of time the affair had lasted, dreadful consequences would follow for the old keeper of the harem, who, her master would realise, had betrayed, her trust.

Her motive for getting Chuchu quietly out of the way was quite plain to me.

Next morning I beckoned Pangiran Piut from the top of the vats, where he was engaged repairing a wooden cover, and took him into my office. I showed him the ointment and showed him some potassium cyanide and then made the same test that I had done the night before.

He agreed that potassium cyanide was never used in native ointments, so far as he knew. He could not explain how it came to be in the one used on Chuchu. As for any attempt on the part of the old woman in charge of the harem at poisoning Chuchu, he, Piut, said he considered such an attempt unlikely. He knew the woman himself, and she was getting far

too much in tips from Chuchu and his family to wish him to die. He agreed that if the temptation was sufficient she would not be above betraying the lovers to her master, said he would look into it, and withdrew. I gathered from his demeanour that he considered my discovery of small importance, and so I dismissed the matter from my mind.

And very soon I had other and more pressing things to think about. As I have said, terrible days were coming for Brunei. And these now began.

Here is another entry from my diary on the fourth day of the month Rabi Alachir :—

" Crushed bark for five vats only to-day owing to two of the factory hands dying of what we think is cholera. It killed them in eight hours."

About that time rain fell in excessive quantities. The skies were cloudy and sunless. The trees dripped. A mist hung over the river. It was the time of the year when the jungle fruits are most plentiful. Boats full of them were being brought by the surrounding tribesmen into the town. And all Brunei was gorging.

The next entry in the diary of importance to me then is a note that the bark contractors

ask permission to stop work for a few days owing to cholera in Brunei. I refused this permission, knowing, however, that they would stop work whether I refused permission or not. My reason for refusing was to be able when writing home to say that I had refused. There was a director on the board of the Syndicate at that time with a large experience of the East. I believed that he was quite capable of telling his colleagues that he had been through a cholera epidemic once a week during his stay out East, and that his work had never come to a standstill for such a reason.

My next entry in the diary states that all the night men in the factory stopped work without giving notice.

We dragged on for a few days more at the factory. Then the sickness in the town became so bad that I could no longer get men to work. So I shut down and emptied the boilers.

I still kept the office open, however, for the purpose of sending soothing replies to the irate cablegrams I was constantly receiving from the secretary.

One of my first steps on finding that we were in for an epidemic was to send a boat over to

Labuan to ask the doctor to pay Brunei a visit. He wrote saying that he could not come, as there had been cases of cholera in Labuan itself, and that as medical officer to the Government and health officer to the port it was impossible for him to leave. But he realised what our position was, and sent back our boat loaded with winchesters full of medicine.

"Give them some of this," he said in his letter. "If the disease has got a grip on them you will not be able to do much. But this will often effect a cure if given early enough. And try some of your cutch on some of the patients, your enemies for preference. It is full of tannic acid and a good dose of it ought to stop even cholera."

The boatmen reported that cholera was bad in Labuan, and that the doctor gave himself no rest night or day. I could believe this latter of him. He was not the sort to slack when there was any sickness about. I wondered what he was saying about the Government now.

We Europeans were not in any great danger, I think, of catching the disease. We had our own separate water supply, and at that time employed Chinese house-servants only. The

assistants were well provided with cards, gramaphones, and other little things to help them while away the time. Refusing their proffered assistance, I went about alone trying the doctor's mixture on the sick Bruneis.

CHAPTER XII

MEANWHILE the learned among the Bruneis were investigating the reason for the presence of cholera in their city. It was in the first place, they decided, a proof that God was angry with them or He would not have allowed it. The actual epidemic was due to a ghost or spirit that was hovering over the town. This was elementary. How to charm the ghost away, that was the question which was exercising everybody's mind. Nobody seemed to have an answer ready.

The spirit, most of the wiseacres considered, had been attracted by the noise of the kites. It was a coincidence that just about that time the Chinese had taken quite a liking for kite flying. Day after day a dozen kites of weird shapes hovered over the city. Some of them made queer noises as the wind played about them. Such noises, naturally, said the Bruneis were bound to attract evil spirits. The Sultan, applied to, at once issued an edict forbidding all flying of kites until further notice. The kites

ceased to fly. But the epidemic increased in severity.

That the visit of the spirit should be blamed upon them naturally irritated the Chinese. The kites had nothing to do with it, they said. The spirit had not come by air. It had come by water. They in their turn tried, without success, to tempt the spirit away. They made a model of a junk, fitted it up luxuriously, filled it with tempting food, and launched it in the direction of the sea at ebbing tide. They reckoned that the spirit would enter the junk, and whilst busy having refreshments would be floated off seawards before it realised where it was going. In order to prevent it from coming back, if by any chance it had been carried away, they made as much noise as they could with drums and gongs. But the spirit stayed in the town. The deaths increased.

Brunei is built over the water. The refuse from the huts goes into the water. And the water is drawn up into the huts in bamboo buckets and used there to wash pots and cooking utensils. Could there be a better means of spreading cholera?

It spread like wild-fire. Daily there were processions of boats from the kampongs to

the cemeteries on the banks of the lake. I used to watch them of a morning from my veranda. The two or three mournful paddlers in the bow. The body amidships covered with a yellow reed mat. And the steersman behind. The graves dug grew more shallow as time went on. The wild pig came to Brunei. I could hear them as I lay in the bungalow at night grunting and squealing at their gruesome work in the cemetery next door to the silent factory.

This ghoulish noise awoke me one night. I went on to the veranda. The moon was up. Mourning Brunei, half-veiled in silver mist, lay on the dimly-gleaming water as if asleep.

The sounds in the cemetery below were so loud and dreadful that a sort of rage seized me. I caught up my gun, put on a pair of canvas shoes, and dressed as I was, I left the bungalow and ran down the hill.

Among the palms it was nearly dark. I saw the white rags tied to the wooden gravestones glimmering. And now all was quiet. The foul beasts had heard me coming and had stolen away.

I walked on, my gun raised, longing for a shot at one of them, and coming down to the water's edge, saw a boat moored to the bank.

This sight was not uncommon at that time. The Malays knew that the cemeteries were peopled with ghosts and evil spirits who came forth at night; and so were accustomed to leave a corpse borne from the kampong at a late hour in the boat until daylight came, when they would return and bury it.

This boat was tied up so close to the shore that I could have boarded it without going into the water. Whether some pig had taken advantage of the opportunity or not I am unable to say. But the reed mat covering had been knocked over and was trailing in the water and the corpse lay exposed.

I noted to my astonishment that it was not dressed in the usual grave wrappings and that it lay a little sideways on the burial sheet.

I saw that it was a woman who had died, and, going down to the water's edge, reached down to rescue the kadjang mat for the purpose of covering her remains.

And then suddenly stopped and stared at the boat in abject fear and horror. The corpse had moved.

It was as much as I could do to prevent myself turning and running away.

But I managed to hold my ground. Thank

goodness I did so, and that my fear became less! For the slight movement of the henna-stained foot which I thought I had detected in the moonlight was followed by a perceptible lifting of an arm. And a small ringed hand came out of the wrappings and with a motion faint and quivering as that of the wing of a moth attempted to remove the veil that covered its owner's face.

I dropped my gun, and rushing into the water beside the woman as she lay there, snatched the veil from her face.

The moonlight, pale and watery, was so dim here under the palms that for a moment I did not recognise her. Indeed, her eyes, accustomed to the twilight of the harem, were sharper than mine.

"The Tuan knows me not," she murmured with a faint smile.

Then, breathless with excitement and surprise, I recognised her. It was Si Ajar.

"But you are sick," I managed to gasp. "What are you doing here, so far from where you live?"

She seemed very weak. Her dark eyes had closed as if the effort of keeping them open was too much for her.

"I was dreaming," she murmured very faintly. "I saw you in a dream, Tuan. And now the dream is true."

And again she lay motionless as if dead.

I stood knee-deep in the water staring at her as she lay there in the dim moonlight. The situation was almost beyond me. What was I to do with her. Sick or not, obviously she could not be allowed to remain in that canoe.

I bent again.

"Do not open your eyes," I said to her, remembering that in her condition the sight of those graves might shock her fatally. "Listen, Si Ajar. Trust me! I am going to carry you right up to my house."

As she made no motion of protest, but remained lying very still, I put my arms around her, picked her up, and hampered as I was by my gun, I carried her up the winding path and deposited her on a long chair on the veranda of my bungalow. Then I ran for the brandy.

"It 's against the wishes of the Prophet," I reflected. "But it 's all for the best."

I got a drop or two of brandy down her throat, loosened her garments and fanned her with a big palm leaf fan that happened to be lying on the table.

Presently she opened her eyes.

" I 'm going to put you to bed now," I said, and with that carried her into my bedroom and laid her on my bed.

" Should I give her a dose of the doctor's medicine," I ruminated, staring at her as she lay, her eyes closed and looking as pale as a corpse.

Her breath was gentle and regular. I took her hand. She certainly had no fever, neither was she cold. I judged, in fact, her temperature to be normal, and that whatever had caused her faintness she certainly had not cholera.

I decided not to give her any medicine and left the room, closing the door softly behind me. She seemed to have fallen into a doze.

I didn't fall into a doze ! I went back to the veranda, got myself a whisky, opened the box of Manila cigars, and making myself as comfortable as possible in a long chair with a sarong wrapped round me because of the mosquitoes, waited for daylight.

It was an exciting situation. My character, I felt, was hopelessly compromised. My chief thought, however, was what the manager's wife, who was prudish to a fault, would say when she came back from Europe and found that a

Malay woman had been sleeping in her bed.

I was in the manager's house while he and his wife were away, acting as caretaker and keeping it aired. She would doubtless say that I had been keeping it warm. I resolved there and then not to let anyone know about Si Ajar's visit if I could help it. I have kept to that resolve. Except for the Chinese servants, who don't tell outsiders about their employer's affairs, and a few humble Malays whom I had to trust, to this day nobody knows about Si Ajar's visit. Stay, I am in error. There was one other person, the Sultan—— But I am anticipating.

When the sun peeped over the edge of the hills, and not before, I went back to the bedroom, this time taking with me a cup of hot tea that the " boy " had brought on to the veranda.

Si Ajar awoke with a start when I touched her shoulder gently, sat up in the bed and stared about her, obviously amazed.

" I am in your house, Tuan," she exclaimed. " How did I come to your house? I feel ashamed."

She turned away her head, covering up her face as it lay on the pillow.

" You 've been ill," I said soothingly.

" Drink this. It is tea that I have brought you."

She made a pettish motion with her free shoulder.

" This is not play," said I very sternly. " I order you to drink this tea."

She took no notice of my request. I spoke to her again in a well-marked, savage tone.

She sat up obediently and took the cup from my hand, looked at me shyly at first and then with a coquettish smile. I frowned. It was as well she should understand that here in the manager's bungalow I did not represent a man. I was something without sex.

" Tell me now what happened," said I.

Her mind did not seem very clear. I had to question her and keep her from wandering from the point. But I got her tale from her in the end.

" I was sitting in my apartment in my husband's house," she said. " I had lighted my cigarette and was eating the smoke. Then he called. His voice was stern. I realised that he was angry. The others in the apartment said to me : ' Take care, Si Ajar, he is angry.' I answered : ' Phui ! what do I care for his anger ? ' and I got up boldly and went without.

He was standing. He caught me by the wrist and pulled me roughly to him. 'How long is it since thou hast been in the company of that dog Chuchu?' he shouted. I knew by his tone that he had found out everything. I remained silent. 'Thou admittest thy guilt?' he cried. I spoke not. It was useless to speak. I stood motionless before him. 'Thou,' he cried. 'Filth! Filth! Thus to bring shame to my household!' He caught me by the neck with his two big hands. I struggled, tried to scream. And presently I knew no more.'

Apparently he had strangled her as he thought and sent her away at once to be buried.

"At what time did this occur?" I asked.

"It was near twilight," she replied. "Look on my neck, Tuan! Are the marks of his vile hands visible?"

They were. Great purple stains. I wonder I had not noticed them the night before. He must have sent her away immediately after the foul deed, anxious no doubt to get the earth over her. And his men, afraid of the cemetery ghosts, had left her at the bank side intending to return in the morning and bury her.

"I will find you something to eat," I said, and went into the dining-room and foraged

round for biscuits. The burying party were doubtless arriving now down below there among the palms. They would get the surprise of their lives when they found the body gone.

I brought back some biscuits, gave them to Si Ajar, told her to stay where she was until I came back, and hurried down the hill.

With as careless an air as possible I sauntered into the burying ground. Yes, there they were, the burying party. The four of them stood on the bank looking at the empty boat.

"It 's a fine day," I remarked heartily.

They seemed dreadfully perturbed. They had not even the presence of mind to say "Tabeh."

"This cemetery is a wicked place," I went on cordially. "There are many ghosts in it. Personally, I should not like to walk here at night."

The four stared at me and then at each other.

"There are also wild pig," I continued genially. "They eat the dead. But they are not as bad as the ghosts."

"The Tuan believes in ghosts?" inquired the tall ruffian at the head of the party, scowling at me.

" I do," I affirmed. " More than ever, for I have beheld them. Last night from my veranda I beheld an enormous one with teeth like an elephant. He flew out from this place and across the river, bearing a corpse with him, perhaps to the nest of his young ones."

" Wah ! " exclaimed the four all together. " Wah ! "

" The corpse looked to me like that of a woman," I continued. " But in the dim moonlight I might have been mistaken."

They remained silent. My excursion into natural history had evidently made a deep impression.

" You are certain you saw this ? " asked the tall ruffian.

" So certain that I have come here to examine the place by daylight. It may have been the ghost of the sakit cholera himself," I added, gaining a brilliant inspiration. " He haunts this side of the lake, I know, for the purpose of counting his victims. The sight of him means death. Dwell in safety, O my friends," I ended. " I now return to my home to eat. Do not stay too long hereabouts. The air is dangerous."

They took my advice. Before I had gone twenty yards I heard the click of paddles and

saw them in their canoe, with the big boat in tow, scuttling across the lake.

My interview with them had been a success. I had given them an explanation of Si Ajar's disappearance, and had also prevented them from examining the soft ground in the neighbourhood and finding my footmarks. In carrying the lady I had sunk ankle-deep in one or two places.

Si Ajar was still in the bedroom. She said that a strange Chinaman had entered, looked at her, remarked that the morning was a fine one, and had then withdrawn. They are tactful souls, the Chinese.

I told her to stay where she was, and on her pouting, brought her chocolates and cigarettes.

The " boy " came in with breakfast. Neither of us exchanged a remark.

The cook, lean, pig-tailed, and solemn of aspect, entered as usual with his account book.

" I should like to speak with the Tuan," he remarked.

" Say on," said I.

" Now that the Tuan's wife has arrived," he began, " I shall require some small addition to my wages. I cannot——"

" Be silent ! " I shouted in surprise and

irritation. I was about to continue the conversation with the remark that the lady was not my wife, but I refrained. Whatever I said he would not believe me.

" Get ready the spare bedroom," I barked to the " boy," " and remove my things to it. The lady will remain where she is at present. I wish nobody to know that a lady is in the bungalow," I said severely.

Both servants nodded. I saw them exchange stealthy smiles. The sight was peculiarly irritating.

" You understand ? " I shouted.

They said both together that they did, absolutely.

" The lady will stay in her apartment and nobody must come nigh her. If strange Malays appear drive them away and let me know. If the lady leaves the house let me know at once. You shall be rewarded."

The cook nodded.

" Am I to cook for her ? " he asked.

I eyed him consideringly. If I said he was he would want an immediate rise in pay. This I could read from his expression. There was no romance about that cook.

" I will decide presently," I told him.

Then I went back to talk with Si Ajar. She would have to stay with me in the meantime, I told her, for there was much sickness of cholera in Pangiran Piut's house, and if she went back to her husband he would probably make another attempt on her life. She agreed that she did not want to return to her husband. Neither in the meantime did she wish to go to Chuchu. She fell in with my suggestion that she should remain shut up in my bedroom for the present quite eagerly, a little too eagerly I thought.

Having impressed on her the necessity of keeping very quiet and received her promise that she would not show herself or stir from the bungalow, I took my topee and went down to my canoe and got aboard.

CHAPTER XIII

BRUNEI was a city of sorrows just then. The cholera had not abated. It seemed, indeed, to grow worse. When would the evil spirit cease to torment them? That was the question everybody asked. The Chinese had tried every method they could think of to drive it from the town. They had scourged themselves, they had burnt unlimited paper prayers to their joss, they had cut themselves with knives. All to no purpose. Now they sat huddled together in their shops waiting for the end. It was my daily task to go to these shops, and very filthy places they were. I bought nothing at them for long enough after the epidemic subsided.

The Malays in their extremity proved themselves, I thought, a shade less stupid and terror-stricken than the Chinese. They prayed to Allah, sensible prayers enough. The mosque was always open. The more ignorant of them shut themselves up in their stifling huts and nailed charms to the doors in order to keep the evil spirit out, much as Londoners shut themselves up at the time of the Great Plague. And

they burnt coal and experimented with various other remedies. But they would not keep clean, and they would persist in eating fruit.

It was pitiful to contemplate their terror and the eagerness with which they welcomed me when I visited them on my morning round. I made friends at that time in Brunei which I kept during all my stay there. There was the Pangiran Jaludin, a near relative of the Sultan, and ordinarily one of the most stand-offish aristocrats imaginable. I found him, on his veranda, shaking like a jelly with fear—he was a portly person—and beginning to be ill. I doctored him and two of his followers who lay near him in their own filth, and got all three on their legs again. He never ceased to thank me. There was Hadji Daut, the money-lender, the richest man but one in the city. I got him through a nasty bout, much to the disgust, I heard, of some of his clients. There was the Sultan's secretary, that suave, silent, highly-educated Malay. I called on him that day. He was convalescent, and really did not expect to see me. But I felt his pulse and looked at his tongue, and pronounced him to be mending fast.

" By the way, Inche," I said as I was leaving

his house, " if the Sultan heard that one of his relations proposed murdering an erring wife would he interfere ? "

The secretary looked at me out of his fathomless black eyes. He was squatting on his small veranda enjoying the fresh air that was blowing in from the sea. He looked, and was, as weak as a rat. But his subtle brain was still in working order.

" Why do you ask ? " he inquired.

" Mere curiosity," I said awkwardly. " We Europeans were having an argument about it, as a matter of fact."

" I don't know what His Highness would do," he answered cautiously. " We never have those sort of cases in Brunei. The people are much too humane."

Cool that, considering many of them had been pirates of the deepest dye not so very many years before !

" But if they were not humane ? "

" No man has a right to dictate how another man shall treat his property," replied the secretary gravely.

" So that is the answer," said I, smiling.

Inwardly I thought what a lot of brutes these Easterners were.

" Well, I 'll be going on. Good-bye."

" Good-bye," said the Inche, struggling to his feet and promptly sitting down again, for he was still weak. " Tell me, Tuan," he asked as he shook my hand, " have you seen His Highness lately ? I know he would like you to call. He told me so when I saw him an hour ago."

" I 'll go to the palace at once," I said.

It tickled my vanity that the Sultan should wish to see me. I hoped that I should be given the chance of curing some of his immediate household. But that was not to be.

The Sultan received me alone, sitting in the small room adjoining the throne-room. He looked old and ill and was very grave.

" None of those of the palace have the sickness," he told me. " So far Allah has been with us. But I hear a favourite grandchild of mine has been struck down, together with her husband. Will the Tuan visit them and give them medicine ? "

I said, of course, that I would be only too pleased to do what I could.

The Sultan paused. I felt his very old, wise eyes fixed on me.

" She is one of my favourite grandchildren,"

he said slowly. "And she is ill. Her husband is not such a favourite. But in accordance with your creed, Tuan, you will do your best for him."

"Why not?" said I. "In sickness one recognises neither friend nor foe."

"The man is a nephew of my Laksamana," said the Sultan. "He is young and headstrong. Like many of the young men about my Court he is bitterly opposed to the influence of the foreigner. And now," ended the Sultan, "in his extremity he asks for the foreigner to come to his bedside. You have heard of him, perhaps?"

"Why, yes," I answered slowly.

I did not feel at all inclined to help the fellow. So far as he himself knew he was a murderer. There were plenty of decent people at that moment lying in their huts waiting for my help. The Sultan knew nothing, so I imagined, about Si Ajar and her love affair.

I looked at him as he sat in his bentwood arm-chair in that little begrimed ante-chamber, a room almost as small and quite as ill-ventilated as Wolsey's room at Hampton Court. The bamboo matting on the floor was torn. The walls were roughly sawn and greasy with the

rubbing of the naked, sweating backs of generations of slaves. The air was heavy with the smoke of native cigarettes. The Sultan sat very bent in his chair, wearing his blue pea-jacket and dirty white linen trousers and dirty canvas shoes. His lined face was ashy pale. His withered lips were stained red with betel juice.

He looked up from his doze. He was very old.

"Why don't you go, Tuan?" he asked. "I thought you had left the palace. My granddaughter is very ill."

"I ask for a guide, Your Highness," I said, rising. "I will do my best for her and her husband."

He shouted something in Brunei dialect as he sat in his chair. A Malay came running from behind the curtain and, bent double, crouched at his feet.

It was the guide.

The house where the Laksamana's nephew lived was built on the bank of the lake not far from the palace.

It was a compact, neat building of the sort usually inhabited by a rich Brunei noble. A long veranda built over the water fronted it.

Behind was the square wooden central apartment roofed with hardwood shingles. Grouped around this lay a huddle of thatched sheds, the lesser apartments, the women's quarters, the huts of the slaves. The whole was surrounded by a heavy bamboo fence of forbidding appearance.

Those in the house were awaiting my arrival, and a man at once conducted me to the room of a sick woman, the principal wife of the owner of the house. He wished me to see her husband first. But I refused.

The woman was not very bad, merely one of the many cases I saw that simulated the true disease. Fright, as happened often with others, had made her ill. I dosed her with the invaluable mixture given me by the Labuan doctor, assured her that she was the most beautiful woman in Brunei, which apparently she already knew, and left her perfectly happy and comfortable. Her husband, I am pleased to record, had cholera. He had it badly too, but the attack had begun only the night before and his chance of recovery was good.

He was a heavily-built, heavy-faced youth, with thick lips and no chin to speak of. He lay on a large string bed in a small, stuffy, windowless

The house of a Minister of State

apartment. The bed mat was of the finest texture. The pillows about him—there were a dozen—were covered with scarlet silk and had elaborately embroidered tinsel ends. Except for the mat there was not a single article on the bed except the patient himself that would stand washing without damage. He would have done emphatically. I told him this. The old man that was attending him promised that my comment should have attention.

"Do not wash him for a day or two," I counselled, looking at the murderer. "He might not be able to endure it."

The murderer nodded a dignified assent as he lay there.

"I will wait till he gets strong," said the oldster.

"Do," said I.

I produced the bottle of mixture and gave the patient a big dose. It brightened him at once. There was something in the medicine that warmed the stomach—ginger, I think.

"How did your master catch the disease?" I asked, looking round the room curiously.

Almost certainly this was the scene of Si Ajar's strangling. It bore every mark of being the master's den. An old-fashioned musket

was hanging on the wall, and below it stood brass-bound timber boxes armed with heavy locks where he kept his dollars and jewellery and other treasures.

The old man was mumbling something. Evidently he was at a loss to explain how the disease had dared to single out his master.

The murderer, frowning, told him to shut his mouth.

"I caught it from one of my household," he cried in anger. "A woman. First she brought shame to me. Now she brings this! Allah!" He shut his eyes. His features grimaced at me.

"A woman," said I. "Misfortune! Personally I never have anything to do with them."

"You are wise, Tuan," he muttered with bitterness.

"Where is the woman now?" I asked innocently.

The face in front of me became distorted with rage and fear. Yet the man never opened his eyes.

"She is dead, Tuan," the oldster interpolated in a trembling tone.

"Misfortune," I remarked again. "If she

were not I probably could have cured her."

" It is of no moment," muttered the oldster.

I gave the murderer strict instruction for his good. He was to keep himself warm, was not to move or to consume anything except milk and broth. He was to take regularly the medicine I would leave with him.

I called again at his house the next day. The lady had mended wonderfully. The murderer seemed to be doing fairly well. " At any rate," I told myself, " I have stopped the disease at the outset, and he 'll probably get better."

And I had one of his wives up in my bungalow ! If I wanted to kill him, merely whispering that in his ear would have accomplished my purpose.

I wondered what they would do in that house if I suddenly blurted out my secret. I wondered what Brunei would do. Probably some of the most fanatical of them, egged on by their Turk and Arabian brothers-in-law, would come by night and set fire to the bungalow.

I had to keep the fact of her being with me secret from even her well-wishers. I did not

dare to send her back among the Malays. Some friend of her husband's, anxious to protect his " honour," would certainly try and complete his crime.

Si Ajar herself was wonderfully easy to deal with. An average young Malay woman, from what I know of their character, would be a dangerous sort of person for a virtuous bachelor to have in his house. As I have said somewhere earlier, Malay women never forget their sex when dealing with a man. They can be very charming, very fascinating. They don't care much for talk about Shakespeare and the musical glasses.

But Si Ajar had, I think, a nature different from that of the average Brunei woman. And she was very much in love with Chuchu.

I asked her as we sat talking on the veranda one evening how it came about that she married her present husband. She was very young at the time, she told me. She had never seen him. Her parents ordered her to marry him.

" It is the adat [custom] in Brunei for a maiden to marry in accordance with her parents' wishes," she explained.

" It is the adat in many countries," said I.

" And in negri London ? " she asked.

" The London is not a country," I told her. " It is a kampong. The largest kampong in the world."

She nodded wisely.

" And in your country, Tuan ? " she persisted.

" We marry for love," said I, generalising.

She was seated cross-legged on a long chair in the shadow cast by the big oil lamp that hung from the middle of the veranda ceiling. Slowly she smoked her cigarette.

" Are you married, Tuan ? " she asked.

I laughed.

" Evidently not," I replied. " Otherwise my wife would be here with me, would she not ? "

This she considered also.

" I do not know," she murmured. " There are many white men. There are few white women. In fact, I have never seen one. Are, then, all the white men not married ? "

" Many of them that come here are not married."

" What are white women like ? " asked Si Ajar. " Are they white all over ? Are you white all over, Tuan ? "

" Yes."

" We women of the Brunei nobility," she

told me, " are white underneath our garments, but not so white as you, Tuan."

" The lady I am going to marry," I said hastily, blushing, I remember, for I was young then and absurdly modest, " has a beautiful skin. Her hair is golden and her eyes the colour of the cloudless sky."

I got up and brought her my fiancée's photograph. She came close to the lamp and looked at it for long enough.

" It is well to be beautiful," she remarked. " If I had the doing of your lady's hair, and if I could dress her as I wished, and make her wear earrings like my own, she would outshine all the Brunei women. Yes, it is well to be beautiful, and then one can hold one's lover. When do I go to Chuchu ? " she demanded in a sharper tone.

" Not yet," said I. " There is sickness in the kampong. Besides, you have enemies in plenty. You must remain hidden. They would kill you."

" I do not fear death," said she after a little while. " I want to go to Chuchu."

" You shall go soon," I promised soothingly. " To go now would endanger his life as well as your own."

I wonder what she would have said had she known that her hated husband was ill, and that I as his physician had over him the power of life and death. I thought it wiser not to tell her this.

CHAPTER XIV

I HAVE indicated that luckily in the circumstances the beautiful Si Ajar was not interested in me as a man. She was in love with Chuchu. And Chuchu was pining for her.

He was sick, but not with cholera. He was listless, but not from physical causes. They had brought him news of Si Ajar's death, and from that moment, so his father told me, he had never looked up.

In vain the other males of the kampong jollied him. In vain they pointed out that Brunei women were extremely plentiful, and all of them charming. He couldn't forget Si Ajar, nor could he, it seemed, stop thinking about her.

These sort of men easily become bores. They are especially unwelcome, so his father indicated to me, during an epidemic. At such times, said the cheery Piut, one's motto should be, "Away with Melancholy." Besides, the ghost of the illness sees the melancholy one flagging, and, sure of his prey, loses no time in pouncing.

"He hasn't pounced yet, though," said I, looking at Chuchu, who was sitting with his back up against a coconut palm, the picture of despair.

And I went on with my work at the kampong, doctoring those who complained of indisposition and chatting with the rest of the cheerful inhabitants.

Pangiran Piut's little kampong had got off lightly. There had been one or two cases of sickness among the children, caused by too free consumption of red water-melon, that curse of Brunei during the spring. But those had made a good recovery, and now what sickness there was had nothing to do with the "little Marys" of the inhabitants, directly that is.

The kampong, as I have mentioned, was situated away from the town up a creek, in the middle of gardens. The palms grew low, and did not keep the fresh breezes from the huts. The sun shone on the huts. There exists no disinfectant like sunshine. And fresh water spouted from the rocks near by.

"Now then, Chuchu," said I, going up to the forlorn one when my round was ended, "buck up, old boy! You 'll get better news soon, very likely."

"He grows mad," said his father, patting him on the shoulder. "In his madness he makes songs."

They were very English in their ways, these lovers. The ordinary Malay when he goes mad runs amok, and has to be extinguished. These two seemed merely spiritless, as though life were no longer worth the living.

I squatted on the turf beside the lover. The blue water of the creek lay in front of me, backed by yellow reeds. The yellow-green fronds of the palms shook in the gentle breeze.

I took off my topee and mopped my heated brow.

"The Tuan will drink coconut water," decided Piut, and in an instant a brown, naked youngster was shinning up the nearest palm.

"When are you going to start work again?" I asked Chuchu. "You know that the factory is shut down. But I can find you plenty to do."

"I cannot work now," he told me, shaking his head.

"Well, at any rate," said I, "come along to the factory and see me one of these days. I want to talk to you. When we do start work I intend offering you a position of responsibility."

He did not reply.

"I will bring him, the rascal!" cried his father threateningly. "Why don't you speak to the Tuan?" he demanded. "Perchance he will confer on you the title of foreman, and the fortunes of all of us will be made."

Chuchu did not come to the factory. His father arrived one afternoon in his dug-out alone. He told me Chuchu was if anything worse. That he feared for him and for them all. Chuchu, it appeared, showed symptoms of madness. He replied to questions in a surly way, did not eat, and preferred to be alone. They feared he would go amok.

"Can you not give him some medicine to cure this?" asked the father anxiously.

And I had the cure up in my bungalow!

I was of a mind to take Piut up and introduce him to her. But he was such a talkative fellow.

"Bring Chuchu along to-morrow and I'll see what I can do," I suggested in order to gain time.

The nephew of the Laksamana, Si Ajar's husband, had almost recovered, the brute. His constitution had shown itself disappointingly strong. I dared not let the lovers meet without carefully planning for secrecy to be maintained. If they were to come together it was better for

this to happen outside Brunei territory. I could send them over to Labuan. One of my friends there would certainly, if I asked him, give Chuchu a berth of some sort.

Unfortunately, Brunei was just then in quarantine. Labuan would not permit people from that city to land on her shores.

It had struck me that day as I paddled on my rounds that the cholera was diminishing, and that my new cases were of a milder type. Signs of activity were becoming visible about the town. I saw men down on the mud busy with their boats. Others had hung their nets out to dry. It might be, I thought, that we soon should get our machinery at the factory started again.

Need I say that the people who appeared to be suffering most pain from our epidemic were certain of the directors of our Syndicate in London. Our secretary, judging from his frequent cablegrams, was half dead with horror and indignation that an epidemic should dare to stop a cutch factory. He would have come out himself, it appeared, to set things right, but his doctor had forbidden him to travel. Meanwhile, so he cabled, contracts were running, customers were threatening legal proceedings,

and unless something were done and at once ruin would be the portion of the shareholders. Naturally I was anxious to prevent a misfortune of this kind. But on the whole the threatened disaster left me cold. I had heard similar tales before.

It grieved me to hear that our genial secretary was ill. Later, when I went home and saw him, he told me that the worries and anxieties of his position had in the opinion of his medical advisers permanently weakened his heart. In spite of his weak heart, later still he took an active part in the rubber boom, and, cabling out, got the Government's permission to select several thousand acres of land where available. He proposed to float a company with a capital of sixty thousand pounds, but unfortunately the only land available proved to be miles away from everywhere, and difficult to develop. This must have damaged his heart still more, for the interests of the shareholders he slaved for and his own honour were ever his dearest care. His bright Hebrew spirit is now fled. He was a cultivated man, an interesting companion, and North Borneo owes much to his efforts.

I went out shooting on the afternoon of the day that Piut came to the factory and managed

to bag four imperial pigeon. A fruit tree in bearing was full of them. The head Sikh watchman went with me.

We fell in with some Kadayans (Malay agriculturists), so my diary says, as we were returning. They said that the cholera had not reached them.

The collection of temporary huts which these Kadayans had erected in a valley at the back of my bungalow was a triumph of neatness. There were women in blue gowns fastened with silver brooches standing before the door husking paddy. They poured the yellow paddy into hollows cut out of the trunks of trees and pounded it with polished poles some four feet long. Very graceful and pretty the young women looked. They stood in pairs, their slender bodies undulating as with their right hands they wielded the poles.

I tossed my pigeons into the bungalow cook-house on my return and went down to the factory with the watchman. A man squatting on the end of the jetty in the light of the setting sun leapt up when he saw me and came running.

"Tuan!" he cried, "long have I waited. The nephew of the Laksamana is again very ill!"

"What 's the matter now ? "

"He has been eating langsat ! It is his favourite fruit. He, lying on his bed, detected the scent of the fruit as we were eating and insisted on sharing it with us."

"I told him not to eat fruit," I pointed out. "Why did you give it to him ? "

"He insisted ! " asseverated the messenger. It was the old man I had met when I visited the murderer first. "He is the master. We are the slaves."

It would have been no use for me to point out that a man who is sick is at the orders of his nurse. The old man's slave mind would not have been able to grasp such a revolutionary idea. I got a few drugs together and accompanied him to his master's house in his dug-out. But I did not use the drugs. The murderer was too far gone for that.

He breathed his last five minutes after I had entered the room.

What a scene there was then. His principal wives weeping, wailing, and tearing their hair. The eldest of them, withered already, although she couldn't have been more than thirty, searching the bed as she wailed and securing the dead man's keys. Strange old women coming into

the death chamber, shouting men leaving in boats on various errands.

I got away as soon as I could obtain somebody to paddle me back to the factory.

Not a bit of sorrow for the fellow moved me. His attempt at strangling Si Ajar I could have overlooked. He had merely acted in accordance with the custom of his country. But I had seen enough of him to thoroughly dislike him. His heart, unlike that of the average Brunei, was black.

Si Ajar was now free. I now had to tell her so.

It threatened to be a strenuous evening.

I began proceedings by having a bath, a change and dinner. Then I called Si Ajar out on to the veranda.

" Do you like living here ? " I asked.

She said that she liked it well. Her natural politeness forbade her making any other reply.

" Then perhaps you 'd like to stay here for ever ? " I suggested, watching her.

She gave me a glance of horror, looking at me as though I had suddenly developed horns and a tail. It was the first and last time I saw a Brunei woman blush.

" You can, you know, if you like," I added.

" I will give you this bungalow, and I will build another one for myself."

The blush faded. Si Ajar smiled.

" The Tuan is making fun of me," she said cheerfully.

" Oh no, I 'm not. Stay here for ever, or come with me to Chuchu at once. Which will you do ? "

There was no question about what Si Ajar wanted. I told her to go and get her things and also to take with her anything of mine she fancied.

" You know, or rather you don't," I went on when she came back in a minute or two wearing—the very thing I hoped she wouldn't take—a tweed coat I had lent her, " that your husband who tried to strangle you is dead ! "

" Dead ! " she shrieked.

" Not so loud," I whispered, " or the cook will think there is something wrong and my good name will be affected. I was his medical adviser," I explained. " I attended him during his fatal illness. He died to-day."

" Tuan ! " she exclaimed, beaming.

In a flash she had come to a conclusion. She put out her arms and made a rush. I jumped aside.

" You poisoned him ! " she cried in a delighted tone. " Tuan ! Newly now he knows ! Ah, how my heart bleeds out gratitude ! Yes, you poisoned him ! "

" I did nothing of the sort," I said angrily. I never expected that she who knew me fairly well would entertain such a low opinion of me.

" Are you ready ? " I asked grumpily. " Well, come on."

I got a lamp and trudged before her down to the jetty. The night had turned out dark. Fearful of crocodiles, I selected the largest canoe I could find and paddled forth.

She crouched huddled in her wraps in the bow. Naturally she was full of questions. I am afraid I replied rather surlily. She would never believe that I had not poisoned her husband, I realised that. And if by chance she did believe it I should, I knew, go down in her estimation. It was annoying.

The journey along the lake and up the creek to the residence of Pangiran Piut took nearly half an hour. The barking of the pariah dogs and the clucking of hens roused the inmates of the houses. Lamps gleamed. Mine was already extinguished.

I leapt ashore, took Si Ajar by the hand, and helped her to follow me.

" Siapa datang ? Who comes ? "

Questions were being bawled at us from the doors.

" It is me, the Tuan from the factory. I wish to speak with Pangiran Piut."

I should have liked extremely to have got Chuchu into a lighted room and then unveiled Si Ajar. But from all accounts he was so near to going mad that the shock might throw him over the border.

Piut scrambled down the ladder of his hut and came up.

" What is it the Tuan wants so late ? " he asked. " Is the Tuan in trouble ? "

" Do not speak," I said in a whisper. " I am the bearer of news. Si Ajar has been found. I have brought her to you."

I was glad then that I had not attempted to spring a surprise on Chuchu. The apparition of Si Ajar, her face staring at him out of the darkness, and the sound of her voice were too much for even the comparatively staid old pangiran.

" Hantu ! Hantu ! Ghost ! " he yelled, and rushed back into his house.

All the other Malays hurried inside after him. They banged their doors.

We were left alone in the darkness.

"They think we're ghosts!" I explained.

"Ghosts!" muttered Si Ajar angrily. "I am no ghost. Chuchu!" she called out in vast distress. "Chuchu! I am no ghost. I am warm flesh and blood. I am your Si Ajar! . . . Si Ajar! . . . Can't you hear me, Chuchu? Don't you know my voice?"

The wind was whispering in the dry palm leaves and water was sighing from the spring near by. Noises came muffled from the dark huts.

"Chuchu! Chinta aku! Come to me!"

She left my side, walking with outstretched arms towards her lover's hut.

The noises grew louder. A door crashed open, emitting a flood of light.

"It is the putri!" shrieked a woman. "It is a fairy! If she clasps you, Chuchu, you will surely die!"

"Let me die!" a voice shouted. "For without her I cannot live!"

I saw a figure rush from the hut and leap to the ground. The happy pair were in each other's arms.

And now others came out with lighted lamps. It was no ghost that Chuchu clasped to his heart, they saw that. It was real flesh and blood. They crowded round Si Ajar, touched her, saluted her. I noted with relief that Chuchu had falsified my alarms by becoming after his first transports of joy quite sober and sensible.

"You want to hear how it all happened?" I shouted to the throng in the lamplight. "Come, let us leave those two idiots together and go into the hut. I'll tell you everything."

I suspected when I left the murderer dead that I was in for an ordeal that night. My suspicion proved correct. I must have sat for at least an hour on the hard matted floor of that stuffy hut explaining in exact detail how it all occurred. First of all I swore all present to secrecy. It was an oath that so far as I know none of them broke.

Si Ajar and her lover did not appear. I saw them for a moment when going to the canoe to be paddled back home.

Chuchu thanked me very calmly and very

gratefully. Si Ajar stood beside him silent and happy. She stretched out her hand when I was leaving and touched mine.

The bungalow when I got home seemed very lonely and cold. I missed that tweed coat of mine frightfully.

CHAPTER XV

THIS chapter chronicles the end of the epidemic. I find from my diary that on the 26th day of the month Jehad Alawal I went round the kampongs and persuaded the factory men to come back to work, and that I also interviewed various bark contractors and got them to promise to send their boats down to the swamps again for more bark.

It had been a dreadful time for Brunei, and most of the huts had to mourn the loss of one or two of their inhabitants. Many of my friends had been taken, but, I am sorry to say, none of those energetic directors of the Syndicate. They were still as lively as ever, and the cable companies were making a fortune out of them. I had a little of the Labuan doctor's wonderful medicine left and was in half a mind to send them a bottle of it. But I forbore.

The principal step I took to ensure that we should get at once a large output of cutch was to cut off all supplies of money from the Bruneis. The epidemic had left every man in the place

extremely hard up. All now went to work at cutch making and bark collecting as though they liked it. And in a very short time the factory was busy night and day.

The contractors were as keen to make money as the men. The more bark they got the bigger their profits were. The more men and boats at work for them the more the bark they got.

As stated in a former chapter, before a bark collector went to work he expected and obtained from his employer an advance in wages. Now so keen were all on making money that some of the bark men began to go secretly to three or more rival contractors and obtain advances from each. This was very confusing, and not satisfactory to any but those who secured the advances.

A note in my diary under date 30th of the month Jemad Alachir runs as follows :—

> Visited bark contractors Pangirans Jaludin and Ahmat. Jaludin says his men at the Kampong Sungei Koyak refuse to go down to swamps. Visited Pangiran Jaludin again in evening. He was most indignant, and said that Hadji Draman had given an advance of wages to the

Sungei Koyak men and wanted them to work for him. Of course, it was not likely that the Sungei Koyak men would work while they could sit in their huts and be visited by rival contractors bringing dollars. I saw Hadji Draman, and a satisfactory arrangement was come to.

My experience during this epidemic had made it apparent to me how advantageous it would be to Brunei if she were handed over to the care of a civilised power. The town was unique, the only one in the world built almost entirely over the water, and the Bruneis were justly proud of it. They were folk who lived a semi-aquatic life, and their methods of living, household arrangements, family life, and town government, adapted as they had been to life over the water, formed an interesting study for the anthropologist. More important still, they loved their life over the water, their women did not wish to live on land, and they were not as a rule keen on agricultural pursuits and the cultivation of gardens.

But it was apparent to me that the cramped conditions under which the inhabitants lived, the damp, the lack of exercise, and the germs

in the filth and mud under the huts could not but affect unfavourably the health of all the inhabitants. The infant mortality was great, the constitutions of many of the adults extremely weak.

At the back of the town behind the Sultan's palace was a large plain known locally as the Padang, an ideal site for a big Malay town. I went into the question thoroughly, and decided that if ever I got the chance I would advocate that the town of Brunei be gradually moved to the Padang.

It was with great pleasure that later I noted that the first British Resident of Brunei had adopted my ideas and embodied them in his report in the following words :—

> " I want a clean, dry village with suburbs of kampong houses.
>
> " I also want to discourage building on the river."

The lesson of the epidemic had been appreciated by others also, and the Europeans of that part of the world began again to speculate on what the future of Brunei was to be. The British Consul, Godfrey Hewett, whose career

Huts of poor Malays.

Huts on the river bank.

in Borneo had been long and distinguished, and who had mainly been responsible for the suppression of the most formidable rebellion that had taken place in that part of the world in recent years, favoured, I believe, the claims of the Rajah of Sarawak.

He, like the Rajah, belonged to one of Britain's oldest families. He had the interests of Brunei at heart. He had no personal ambitions to serve. He knew that the honour and the welfare of the people of Brunei and their ruler would be safe in the hands of the Brooke family.

Unfortunately for Britain, not all her servants are men of the type of Godfrey Hewett and the Brookes.

British officials are now selected not because they are of a type likely to be a credit to the flag under which they serve, but because they have been successful in passing certain examinations. The Eastern Services nowadays contain several officials of obscure antecedents, no morals and great ambitions. And some of these men viewed with great disfavour the high position attained by the Brooke family.

Had the Rajah of Sarawak, that great man, been of the kind to curry favour with those temporarily in office at home the history of

Brunei might have been different. Had Godfrey Hewett been other than the blunt, straight Englishman that he was the history of Brunei might have been different.

Happy are the peoples who live under the disinterested rule of the Brookes. Alleyne Ireland, the expert sent out by the United States Government to investigate the various governments of the East says in his report :—

> " With such knowledge of administrative systems in the tropics as I gained in almost every part of the British Empire I can say that in no country which I have ever visited are there to be observed so many signs of a wide and generous rule, such abundant indications of good government as are to be seen on every hand in Sarawak."

It was to Sarawak that I and other Europeans looked, and that the people of Brunei themselves looked, to the country surrounding Brunei, prosperous, justly governed by men of gentle breeding and high honour, very lightly taxed. It is a pity the people of Brunei were not consulted when the change of government was made in their country.

The fate of the country was decided by those who never came within thousands of miles of it. We on the spot were helpless. All we could do was to turn to our immediate tasks and hope that the right would prevail.

Having shaken off the epidemic, Brunei soon became herself again. Coal was brought to the factory regularly from Brooketon in the Sarawak Government steamer. The captain, an old Malay about to retire on a Sarawak Government pension, gave us the latest news from Kuching. They were finding great quantities of gold up country, he told us. A new seam of coal had been discovered at Sadong. People, tired of collecting rubber from the jungle, were beginning to plant it in their gardens. Indeed, he thought of planting some himself. It was so easy. All you had to do when the trees were grown was to sit and extract the rubber.

Signs of the times these. In Malaya planters were bringing under cultivation the land that was to make their fortunes a few years hence. Neither I nor anyone else in Brunei had yet beheld those seeds, speckled like blackbird's eggs, grown from the Brazilian tree in Singapore, that in time were to bring abounding prosperity to the whole of the Middle East.

Weddings in Brunei just then were many. The young people were making up for time lost during the epidemic. I was interested in one only, that of Chuchu and Si Ajar. They celebrated it very quietly. No one outside their kampong knew that a marriage had taken place there. The Imaum had to know. But he was short-sighted and did not recognise Si Ajar. I understand Pangiran Piut told him that she was a sort of second cousin who had lately come from Labuan to reside among them. He did not want the Imaum to ask any awkward questions.

For a month before the wedding Chuchu had been busy building himself an annex to his father's hut. The young married couple went to live in it directly after the wedding.

Love matches are suspect nowadays and with reason, especially when it is a married person that takes a share in the preliminary courting. This love match turned out well. Chuchu in time got his foremanship at the factory. He and his wife have many children now and they are happy.

What with my work at the factory and my days and nights aboard steam launches down in the estuary inspecting the bark swamps,

I had very little time just then to spend in the town.

When I did paddle round it nowadays my reception was very different from what it had been before the epidemic. Everyone knew me, and where cold, indifferent eyes stared at my boat before now I got always a friendly greeting.

I had not seen the Sultan for a couple of months, and when a message came to me that he desired to speak to me I was more than glad to go. I was seated on the veranda of Pangiran Jaludin's house talking to the pangiran himself when the message came.

I realised that the Sultan had espied my canoe, and guessed that he had sent for me on the spur of the moment. And so it proved.

He was alone in his small ante-room, most favoured by him of all his apartments, and seemed in a cheerful mood.

"I want to buy some planks from you, Tuan," he told me in explanation of having summoned me. "I hear that the ship has brought you some fine ones from Sandakan."

"Do not buy them, Sultan," said I. "You shall have them with pleasure as a gift from our Syndicate. I will send them along at once."

The Sultan would not accept the gift. He

insisted on paying for the planks. More, he produced a key, bent and opened a box at his feet and handed me the money in silver dollars.

" I want to build a small house looking seawards," he said. " So that I can eat the wind there in comfort, and with my telescope examine the ships that enter the port."

" It will be pleasant and cool, Tuan Sultan," I agreed.

" Sometimes ships come now and they do not tell me about them," he complained. " They believe I am getting old. And perhaps they are right. But my brain is by no means dry yet."

" Tuan Sultan is not old yet," said I. " He is a strong man."

It was true. His grip when he shook my hand on entering was like iron. It would have gone hard with Si Ajar if her husband had possessed such a grip. Many were the stories that the Malays had told me of the Sultan's power and ruthlessness in his young days. I believed them all when I looked at his face and his hands. He could never have ruled Brunei had he not been firm and strong. I didn't like him the less because he possessed

those characteristics. There should, I think, be something of the eagle about a king.

" My people have suffered much from the cholera," he remarked. " It is one of the worst periods of sickness I remember. And I remember dozens. The spirits of the sickness come and go and who knows anything about them? First fever comes, then small pox, then cholera, and then fever again."

" Tuan Sultan should get a European doctor from Singapore," I suggested.

" A doctor!" said the Sultan. " True, doctors have their uses. But where is the money to pay the salary of such a man?"

" He would not be costly," I explained. " Perhaps you could get one for three hundred dollars a month and his expenses."

" It is too much," he answered after consideration. " Besides, you, Tuan, are a doctor."

" Not a real doctor."

" My people say you are very skilled," he laughed. " I shall certainly get you to attend on me if I fall ill. Tuan," he went on eagerly, " how many doctors has the Rajah of Sarawak?"

" Three or four, I think," I replied.

" Once all Sarawak belonged to my ancestors," he remarked with a certain pathos.

"It does not matter," I returned quickly. "The Sultan of Brunei and the Rajah of Sarawak are brothers. Rajah sama Rajah."

"When the doctor from Labuan visited me last and I told him that my revenue was not sufficient for my expenses," he went on to say, "he advised me to approach the Rajah of Sarawak, who would give me an ample revenue and rule my country jointly with me."

"It was good advice," I said without hesitation.

He looked at me keenly, then laughed.

"The Tuan thinks so," he commented. "I will remember that when the matter is again discussed. Yes, I am willing enough. It will be for the good of my people. Others are not so willing. But no matter. Let us talk of other things. Does the making of cutch go well?"

"Very well, Tuan Sultan."

"I wish it well. So many of my people earn their bread by making cutch and by getting bark."

After that silence for a while. The Sultan's head drooped on his chest. He appeared to be dozing.

It was baking hot in that little ante-chamber.

The afternoon sun was beating on the wooden walls and the corrugated iron roof. I felt almost stifled and wished to go.

"Yes," muttered the Sultan after a while, his chin still sunk on his breast, "you helped my people as a doctor, Tuan. Accept my thanks, if you please."

I murmured something and rose, topee in hand. He signed to me impatiently to be seated again.

"I will tell you when to go," he said with dignity. "I have more to say. You would wish to be rewarded for your help during the epidemic? Would you care to accept the title of Dato?"

I shook my head.

"I want no reward," I said.

Then I remembered. There was something I wanted from the Sultan. He had in his possession a sort of history of Brunei. If he would only give me a copy of that. He promised it at once and sent it to me later, translated into English and written out neatly on foolscap.

"But that isn't enough," he cried. "I would give a copy of the history to anyone who wanted it. But you must have a reward for the good work you did."

I shook my head. I wanted nothing.

" Think of it ! " he cried. " I offer to reward you, and you will not accept anything ! If all others had been like you, Tuan, I would be a rich man to-day. But then you white men are peculiar persons. We Malays cannot understand you. You wished the Laksamana's nephew death. You must have done so. Yet he died of a surfeit of langsat. If you had been a Malay you would have poisoned him."

I stared at him in great surprise.

" Why should I have wished to poison him ? " I demanded.

The Sultan laughed.

" You see, Tuan," he remarked enigmatically, " I am old enough to be your grandfather, but my brain is not yet dry."

What did he know about me and Si Ajar ? What did he suspect ? Where had he got his information ? I felt myself growing uncomfortably red.

" Come, now," said the Sultan, chuckling at my obvious discomposure. " What reward do you wish for your good work on behalf of Brunei ? "

I lost my head a bit then. I was young and could not stand being laughed at.

" What if I ask to be made Sultan of Brunei ? " I called out cheekily.

The words were hardly out of my mouth before the Sultan stretched out his two strong hands, caught my wrists in a grip of iron, rose from his bentwood chair and thrust me into it. He drew his royal, gold-mounted kris and pushed it into my hand.

" Tabek, Tuan Sultan," he said mockingly. " Tabek ! Now what do you want ? You don't know ? " He laughed, looking into my very foolish face. " Allah ! Allah ! But so many Sultans look and feel the same as you do ! "

Yes, I looked and felt very foolish. But now I derive satisfaction from the memory of the incident. For at least thirty seconds I grasped the royal kris and was a king in Borneo.

CHAPTER XVI

MY intercourse with the Sultan ended with that interview. The Manager, or to give him his Malay title, the " Tuan Bezar," came back from leave and I returned to my duties as engineer of the factory. We were all very busy with the erection of more boilers, the fettling up of a new launch, and the other work incidental to an increase of output of cutch.

I had ceased thinking over what was to be the future of Brunei, when suddenly we got the news that Godfrey Hewett, the British Consul, had been stopped in Singapore on his way to Labuan and told that he was to hand over the Consulship at once and be transferred elsewhere.

He was, I heard, indignant at being treated with so little ceremony. But he handed over his office, and presently the new Consul paid us a visit in Brunei.

A dapper little fellow, with dark, round eyes and a smallish chin, was the new Consul.

He had the reputation of being one of the coming men in the Singapore Government Service.

On first acquaintance we found him an improvement on Godfrey Hewett. Hewett was dignified and inclined to be stand-offish. The new Consul was affability itself. He told us that he usually wore a moustache, but had shaved it off when taking part in some amateur theatricals in Singapore. We were disarmed.

He came to live with us at the cutch works, sharing a house with one of the assistants.

What chums we all were! We went about the river with him in his boat. We told him all we knew and all we thought about Brunei and Sarawak, and the Sultan and the Rajah, and everything else for that matter.

The new Consul's head-quarters were at Labuan, but he spent most of his time in Brunei. During the day he wore white duck like most of us Europeans. But in the evenings he adopted native garb, and being of sallow complexion, looked very like a Malay.

His knowledge of the Malays, so far as could be gathered from his conversation, was profound. He loved their company, and on going to his quarters of an evening one would usually find

some native or other squatting on the veranda smoking a palm leaf cigarette and talking about Brunei.

And the Consul, as I had done before him, took to the river and visited the Bruneis in their houses. But where I had used a dug-out he acquired also a yacht and, aided by me, fitted it with a centre board.

This yacht, with its sail flapping and its centre board stuck in the mud, grew to be one of the common sights of Brunei. I don't know how often the Consul was rescued by fishermen and others. However, as many a woman knows, getting into a predicament is not a bad way of making new acquaintances.

But the Consul's real chance came when we had another epidemic. Yes, a short year after that terrible visitation of cholera Brunei had to suffer once again. Small-pox broke out.

Like the cholera, the disease spread with great rapidity. The Bruneis knew little of vaccination, but they were accustomed to inoculate each other with small-pox itself in order to catch the disease in a less virulent form. And this they proceeded to do.

The Consul went over to Labuan and got

into cable communication with Singapore. The Government there roused itself, and after a while a warship came up with hospital tents, medical gear, and three doctors. They came too late to do much good. They vaccinated a few people and visited others. But Brunei remembers them chiefly as the men who gave away the condensed milk.

Condensed milk is, I believe, of considerable service in cases of small-pox, and Brunei did not run short of it then. Thousands of tins were given away to all who cared to come to the temporary surgery for them. The Bruneis were quick to take advantage of the situation. Men would call at the surgery again and again, and, passing in unrecognised, acquire a few more tins. Some of them managed to accumulate a considerable stock.

Whether the death roll in Brunei from small-pox was as great as it was during the cholera epidemic I never knew. But in the palace itself the losses were appalling. The two elder sons of the Sultan, the Sultan's grandson, and the Bandahara's daughter all were taken.

All these deaths occurred in spite of the skill of the doctors and the heroic efforts of our new Consul. The latter went round Brunei daily

in a large canoe paddled by half a dozen paddlers and flying a large Union Jack. His obvious indifference to danger and the heartening speeches he made from his canoe in Singapore Government Malay encouraged the Bruneis not to despair. The small-pox quickly disappeared. The doctors put down its disappearance to their condensed milk. But some of the wise men of Brunei said that the ghost of the small-pox had fled in alarm before the new Consul and his Union Jack.

After the epidemic had ended I went home on leave. When I returned to Brunei some months later it was as manager of the Syndicate in Borneo.

Affairs in Brunei had moved quickly during my absence. I came up in the same steamer as one of the principal officials of the Straits Government who was on a special mission to the Sultan. It appeared from what he said that my appointment as manager was a surprise to his Government. It was well known to all, of course, that I was a strong supporter of the claims of the Rajah of Sarawak.

Rumours now were thick that His Highness the Sultan had already consented to accept

Planting rubber.

The British Residency.

the advice of the British Government in the conduct of the affairs of his state, and allow a British Resident to reside in Brunei. He was to receive, the rumours said, a large yearly allowance and a big sum on signing the treaty.

Some of the rumours proved correct. One morning some time after I had taken over the management a British gunboat came up the river and anchored. A salute boomed out from her. An answering salute came from the palace. I saw from my veranda a launch full of white-clad figures come swiftly across the lake and draw up alongside the palace landing steps.

The white-clad figures ascended. For a time Brunei remained silent in suspense. Then again the guns boomed, telling the news to all.

Brunei was an independent state no more. Another country had been added to the British Raj, another load to the taxpayers' back.

I was disappointed, and perhaps did not conceal my disappointment. I had hoped the Rajah of Sarawak, that great Englishman who had deserved so well of his country, would in his old age have been permitted to round off his kingdom by the absorbing into it the

State of Brunei, for which he had done so much.

A little later he called at Brunei in his yacht, the *Zahora*, and I went on board to pay my respects to him. But I did not tell him what my hopes had been. What was the use? The thing was done. There was no reversing it.

Anyone who saw the boats flocking round the *Zahora* during that visit knew at once where the hearts of the people of Brunei lay. The Rajah had his reward.

Others had their rewards too for the push and superlative diplomacy they had displayed on behalf of the Brunei people. But their rewards were of a more substantial nature. Another Government steamer entered Brunei, bearing the new British Resident, who, I was surprised to find on going on board, was none other than our modest erstwhile Consul.

He was looking well and received me with great affability. There was nothing, he said, he hoped for more than the success of the cutch works, for the welfare of Brunei was bound up in them. A month later the British Government was driving a road through the middle of

our cutch works land within a yard or two of the cutch works itself, although it was known to them that our process was a secret one and that a public highway through our property was the last thing we desired.

Later on still, one of many pin-pricks, the Government put a heavy import duty on all goods consumed by the Europeans in Brunei, most of whom were employed at the cutch works. An annoying feature was that the Government officials themselves were exempt from this duty, although they were very much better paid than we at the cutch works. It was annoying also to have to stop work to pay this duty on small consignments of goods from Labuan. I remember vividly one day an incident of this kind occurring. I was in the middle of an experiment in the laboratory. A Malay whom I had dismissed from the factory came up to me. He wore a smart hat and some sort of uniform, and was evidently now connected with the newly instituted Customs department of the State.

" There 's some tobacco come for you from Labuan in your launch," he shouted to me through an open window.

"Very well," I said. "I will send down the duty money later on."

"You can't have the tobacco till I have received the money, the head says," he returned.

Very important was this Malay, rejoicing also naturally at being able to exercise authority over a white man who had dismissed him.

"I do not call you 'Tuan Bezar,'" he added gratuitously as I left my work and went to the office to fetch the money. "I have been told to call you 'Tuan Manager.' For the Tuan Resident himself is the only Tuan Bezar that there is in Brunei now."

I gave the man his money and sat down at my desk . . . and I beheld a vision. . . .

I saw bureaucrats everywhere. Their number increased astonishingly. They spread all over the earth. No one dared resist them. They were too powerful. They hated greatness and they feared it. And no one dared be great. I saw the Sultan of Brunei, his freedom taken from him, lying dead. I saw the Rajah of Sarawak dead. I saw myself watched, thwarted, treated with seeming fairness, isolated, and at

last abandoned even by those who should have been my friends.

I felt so discouraged at that moment that I was on the point of writing out my resignation. But I did not write it out. I remained at my post.

J.W. ARROWSMITH Lᵗᵈ
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